

C R A C K

DETECTIVE STORIES

JAN.
1947

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**PLACE
OF
SHADOWS**
By Robert C.
Dennis



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CRACK
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C R A C K DETECTIVE STORIES

Volume 8

January, 1947

Number 1

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ROBER W. LOWNDES, Editor

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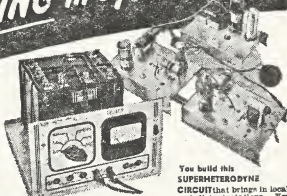
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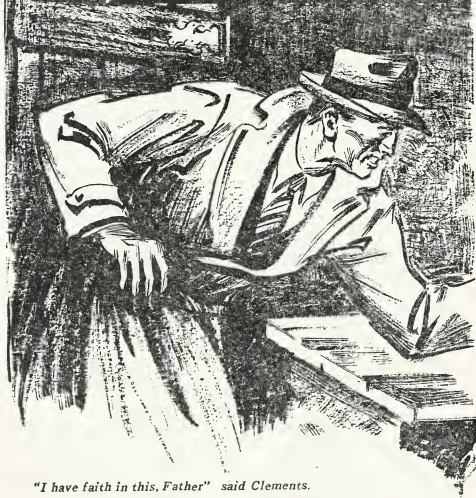
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Place of

by Robert C. Dennis



"I have faith in this, Father" said Clements.



*Clements was no criminal,
even though he had paid the
price of prison for a mistake.
But now there was murder in
his heart.*

THE DISTANT, prolonged wail
of a train's whistle stretched
across the swirling darkness,
fading gradually into the laboring of
the storm. The man on the platform
of the lonely, wayside station had

Shadows



paused for a moment to listen. Now, his body hunched away from the lacerating wind, he resumed his restless stamping. The frozen boards of the platform squealed beneath his weight. There were no other sounds.

The light within the station went

out and the station master came out on the platform, locking his door behind him. He shot the man a quick glance and said grudgingly, "*They* called a few minutes ago. A car'll be comin' for you."

The man's answering nod was curt.

He did not speak, he had not spoken since alighting from the train. The station master hesitated briefly and then swung off the edge of the platform and went away up the road. In a matter of seconds he was out of sight. The man on the platform barely saw him go.

"Mr. Anser." The voice came in out of the storm, disembodied. The man on the platform had not heard the sound of a car. He squinted against the flailing snow and then pulled up sharply. A huge cowed figure had materialized from the darkness, dim and shapeless in a dark robe that reached to his ankles. With that peaked hood casting a shadow where the face would be, the figure was more of a Presence than a man. "I'm from the monastery," he said. "We'll have to hurry."

The man called Anser nodded, trying to conceal his shock. A *monastery*. The gun in his left-hand coat pocket was suddenly heavy and awkward.

"This way, Mr. Anser," the monk said. They went down the steps of the platform and along the front of the station. The car was parked close in at the far end of the building. "I thought you would be in the waiting room, Mr. Anser. It's always unlocked. There's no fire, but it's out of the wind. Didn't the station agent tell you?"

"No. It didn't matter. You weren't long getting here."

THERE WAS no heater in the car. In the dim light from the dashboard the monk's face was shadowed and somber with deepset eyes holding no emotion, no expression. "I'm Brother Gerard," he said, starting the car. "You'll want to know about Mr. Rocco."

"Yes. Why is he in a monastery?"

"The people who found him brought him to us. His car had gone down a twenty foot bank, rolling over several times. Mr. Rocco was badly hurt—his back. You'll meet Brother Charles—he's our doctor. He'll tell you about that." The monk laughed suddenly, a deep, soft chuckle rumbling in his massive chest. "You would

have had a time locating him if Father Vincente hadn't written."

"I would have found him," Anser said. The gun was no longer heavy or awkward. It was a physical extension of his hate. "I would have looked a long time for him."

The monk looked quickly at him and then back at the road. He was driving as fast as the limited visibility would permit. The snow slashed at the headlights like an endless swarm of angry gnats. "We should have written sooner but your friend had little identification on him and he was unconscious for days." He broke off to swing the car sharply into a driveway that appeared out of the storm without warning. "Vespers is in ten minutes. You might like to attend. Afterwards Father Vincente will see you."

In the beam of the headlights Anser saw the monastery, a low bleak building a gray stone. Dead brown ivy veined the walls as if to reinforce them. Brother Gerard switched off the lights and in the swirling darkness, square windows showed a dim yellowing light. Anser followed the Monk to the front entrance where a heavy oaken door adorned with a wrought iron knocker swung ponderously open to admit them.

Brother Gerard led the way down in a bare, drafty hall. "This is our chapel, Mr. Anser. Beyond this is the infirmary. You can sit here in the visitor's gallery." He smiled and hurried away leaving Anser alone.

The gallery was dark. Anser fumbled his way to the rail and peered down into the cavernous chapel. A few candles threw out a fitful eerie light and when his eyes were adjusted to the gloom he saw a double line of hooded, anonymous figures, carrying lighted tapers, begin to creep slowly down the aisles. A low, monotonous chant welled up, almost lost in that big dark room.

"... *anima mia Dominum*"

The words had a queer hollow ring against the vaulted ceiling, like stones down a deep well. The chant went on and on, gentle, rhythmic, monotonous.....

A strange feeling swept over An-

ser, a hypnotic, unreal sense of having lost all contact with everything that was familiar and substantial. The great, grotesque shadows of those cowed figures moving slowly toward the altar was like something medieval, wholly unknown and yet somehow elusively familiar, like the nostalgia for things long forgotten. He had a sensation that time was without meaning here, neither past nor future, thus dwarfing everything physical into insignificance. Even the hate burning like raw acid in the chest seemed, somehow, remote and out of the way.

"Gloria Patri."

This wouldn't do! With a sudden angry motion he flung himself out of his chair and went stumbling frantically out of the gallery. In the long dim hall, outside, the feeling persisted but with diminishing strength like the train's whistle fading into the storm, distant and infinitely sad...

BROTHER Gerard came down the hall, shuffling a little in his black sandals. He said, in his deep, low voice, "Father Vincente will see you now."

He led the way into a small cell with white painted walls lined with books. Above the book were oil paintings of saints looking down with brooding, recondite eyes. A small table and two leather-covered chairs were the only pieces of furniture in the room. Father Vincente sat in one of the chairs, a slender man, white haired and ancient as the saints in the paintings. His eyes had that same expressionless, deep set quality.

"Father, this is Mr. Anser."

"Thank you, Brother Gerard," the old man said. His smile released the big monk without making it a dismissal. "Sit down," he invited Anser. "You may smoke if you wish."

"Thanks," Anser produced a cigarette from an inner pocket with his left hand. His movements were smooth and quick. "I'd like to see Rocco, Father."

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid I cannot permit it. You see we grant shelter here to anyone who asks it. Mr.

Rocco needed help and we provided it to the best of our abilities—. We also give protection—"

The old man's voice was strangely gentle. "Who are you, my son? You aren't Mr. Anser. Not the friend that Mr. Rocco was expecting."

The man let smoke trickle out of his nostrils, a tiny screen to hide his shock. "How did you know that?"

Father Vincente made a gesture with hands that were white and beautifully sculptured. They were the hands of an artist; a young artist. "Mr. Rocco gave me a very complete description of his Mr. Anser. A short rather stout man, nearly bald. A flat nose and heavy eyebrows. That doesn't fit you, does it, my son?"

"No," the man admitted. "No, I'm not Anser."

"Then perhaps you are James Clements... You don't need to answer," he added quickly. "Mr. Rocco's description of James Clements fits you very well. I was merely giving into a whim of mine—guessing. I'm sorry.

JAMES CLEMENTS said in mild surprise. "It's quite all right, I didn't claim to be Anser. Brother Gerard jumped to a conclusion... I suppose Rocco has told you at least some of the situation?"

The old man inclined his head. "He seemed anxious to talk of it. We didn't press him."

Clements' voice was bitter. "Do you want to hear the truth of it?"

"I should like to hear it, if you want to tell me," Father Vincente replied. "We ask no questions of a man's past here."

"I see." Clements got up and walked the length of the small room. "I'm going to kill Dave Rocco, Father."

Father Vincente sat very still but his expression did not change.

"I suppose that shocks you. It would shock me too, if I had the capacity for any emotion." He swung around and paced back the other way. "I won't bother you with details. Rocco swindled me out of a large sum of money. It wasn't my money; I borrowed it from the firm where I worked. There was no intent to steal

on my part—I had money in my bank account." He made a harsh sound in his throat that took the place of a laugh. "I shouldn't have been so stupid as to fall for Rocco's game! I shouldn't have borrowed the money! I admit that. But I can't accept the punishment I received as justified."

"You were punished?"

"I lost my job. I lost the respect and trust of every man and woman in town. My fiancée deserted me. I replaced the money with my savings to avoid a jail sentence. There was nothing left, not even self respect." Clements sat down abruptly across from the old abbot. "My life was wrecked by Dave Rocco."

"So," Father Vincente said, "you are going to kill him." Something rippled across his face. "You didn't Mr. Anser...?"

"No," Clements said, "I didn't kill Anser. The temptation was there. They were partners, but there was nothing to indicate that Anser was in on this deal. No, I just knocked him out. When Rocco disappeared from town I had an idea he would contact his partner sooner or later. I watched Anser for three weeks. When he went to the station this morning I followed and knocked him out in the washroom. He was carrying a piece of paper containing instructions on when to come and where to get off the train...."

Father Vincente was silent for a long moment and then he asked, "Will you tell me how much money you lost, Mr. Clements?"

"Eight thousand, five hundred dollars."

"Yes," Father Vincente said nodding. He opened a drawer in the table and took out an envelope. He laid it in front of Clements. "Your money is there, all of it."

CLEMENTS opened the envelope, glanced incredulously in at the sheaf of bills. "I don't quite understand...."

"It's very simple. Mr. Rocco had a change of heart since he came to us... I don't say he's become a Christian but he did feel that he'd done you a great wrong. His reason for

asking me to write Mr. Anser was to find you. I felt he didn't trust his friend enough to let him return the money."

Clements laid the envelope down and pushed it a few inches away from him with one finger. "Will this bring back my job? Or the respect of my friends? Will a few thousand dollars bring Janet back to me?" He laughed harshly again. "Dave Rocco's change of heart, Father, doesn't impress me. He's still a thief and a rat. You may tell him that returning the money won't save him."

"You intend to....?"

Clements' voice was hard. "I intend to have my revenge!"

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." Father Vincente intoned. "Don't you feel that you can trust Him to judge Mr. Rocco fairly?"

Clements drew his left hand from his pocket and the gun was in it. "I have faith in this, Father," he said. "But don't worry... I don't intend to cause trouble here. Just tell Rocco that some day, somewhere, I'll meet him again. He can't claim the protection of these walls forever. I'm stymied this time—but I can wait. With this money I can wait even longer."

"There are more things I could tell you, Mr. Clements, but feeling as you do, what would it accomplish?" Father Vincente's shoulders moved under the brown robe. "It's late. We rise very early here. I will ask Brother Gerard to show you to your cell. Perhaps we can talk again in the morning, Mr. Clements."

"No, Father. I'm not staying. There's a train back in an hour. I'll go back to the station to wait. I understand the waiting room is always unlocked."

"Yes, that is true. There's a stove there too, I believe, and no doubt something to burn. Brother Gerard will drive you back, but you are welcome to wait here till train time. Or till morning."

"I'd better go now." Clements smiled held no humor. "I don't trust myself under the same roof with Dave Rocco."

Father Vincente started to speak

and then held back the words. He said simply, "God bless you, my son."

The wind had blown the snow from the night but the darkness seemed blacker than before. Brother Gerard did not speak on the ride back. Now that he could see the estimate distances, Clements decided the monastery was only about a mile from the station. He could have walked. When they had stopped, Brother Gerard put out a large hand and gave Clements a strong, brief handshake. "Goodbye, Mr. Clements."

"Thanks," Clements said. "Thanks a lot." He wished he could say more but there was nothing more to say. He watched the car back around and drive away, the tail light's gleam showing for several minutes. Then shielding his stiffened face from the freezing wind he went on into the waiting room.

There was no light, but after a moment Clements could make out a dark bulk in the center of the room that would be the stove. He found the piece of paper he'd taken from Anser and a match...

A VOICE in the dark said, "Stand right where you are, Clements. I've got a gun here and I can see you quite plainly."

"Anser," Clements breathed.

"It's me all right. You musta forgot there was a later train up here. Or did you think I'd just give up because you knocked me out? How was Dave?"

"I didn't see him," Clements returned slowly, straining his eyes to see Anser's short, heavy form. "They said his back was hurt."

"Too bad," Anser said. "I was hoping you would get to see him. I won't have time myself. You've got the money, haven't you, Clements?"

Clements didn't answer.

"Of course you have. You didn't see the letter Father Vincente wrote but he said Dave wanted to give it back." He chuckled hoarsely. "They must have thumb-screws in that place! You can't tell me religion could do *that* to Dave Rocco. I want the money, Clements; that's all I was going up there for in the first place.

You saved me a lot of trouble. I was expecting you to show up like this." His voice hardened. "Toss it over here."

"No," Clements said. "It's my money. I'm damned if you'll have it."

The thunder of Anser's gun was deafening in the small waiting room. Flame spurted abruptly from the dark corner. Something hot and sharp burned across Clement's chest. He lunged sideways collided with the big round iron stove, and followed its curve around to the other side. His own gun was in his left hand, big and unfamiliar but reassuring.

Anser's second shot hit the stove with a clang and went ricocheting through a window. Clements fired at the flash, the gun kicking wildly in his hand. It was blind shooting, but Anser apparently hadn't thought that Clements also was armed. And his broad form made a perfect target. Clements fired again, frenzied that the advantage might yet slip away.

There was the sound of choking and a sodden clump as Anser struck the floor...

When Clements crept over beside him, his breathing had stopped. With a hand that shook so hard that the first match went out, Clements lighted the piece of paper and, in its brief flare, looked down at Anser's face. He had never before seen a man who had died violently. It was not pretty to see.

"I did that," he said aloud. "I killed a man!"

THE PAPER burned his fingers and he dropped it. In that cold, dark room he began to shake convulsively, uncontrollably. Not until this moment had he considered what his feeling would be when he killed Rocco. He had thought only of the deed itself, and the hatred burning in his soul had made contemplation of murder a simple and natural thought. But now with Anser's blood making his fingers sticky, revulsion came in a wave of nausea.

He had taken a man's life. His own losses—job, friends, self-respect, Janet, all those things could be re-

covered or replaced. Rocco had given back the money he had stolen. But he, James Clements, could never, now or at any time, give back to Anser the breath of life.

And this had been self-defense justifiable in the eyes of the law! *What if he had killed Dave Rocco in cold blood!*

The gun slipped from his icy fingers and clattered on the waiting room floor. Walking stiffly as if constricted by great pain he went outside into the bitter night. He had to tell Father Vincente. Somehow that was more important now than anything else. He had to tell him that he was not going to kill Rocco.

It was only a mile back to the monastery, he could walk it. The cold wind bit into him, stiffening his joints. Only his chest was warm where he was bleeding a little from Anser's bullet. But it was just a scratch; he didn't even feel it. He drew into his lungs some of the icy air and his head reeled from it. He began to run with a vague franticness.

"*Tell Father Vincente,*" he mumbled. The need to hurry was urgent but strangely he was no longer running, somehow the effort was just as great. A fear that he might miss the monastery grew in him, because now he couldn't even see very clearly.

The night was so dark he was blind. He remembered nothing until he was at the monastery door, pounding the wrought iron knocker. Every-

one was asleep, of course. He wished Father Vincente would hurry. He had to tell him immediately. . . . As if in a dream he knew that Brother Gerard opened the door and picked him up bodily in his powerful arms. Someone named Brother Charles. . . the doctor, of course. And then there was a merciful darkness for a few moments.

He knew he was in the infirmary beyond the chapel. Mistily he saw Father Vincente's ancient kindly face hovering over him.

"Father—"

"You'll be all right now, my son," the old man said. "Brother Charles says you're out of danger."

"I came back to tell you." The words were an effort far beyond their size. "I've changed my mind; I won't bother Rocco. That's why I came back."

"And a good thing you did!" Brother Charles growled from the other side of the bed. "Five minutes more and you would have bled to death!"

There was no hatred in Clements now; only a strange peace. Everything was all right. "Tell Rocco, Father, he has nothing to worry about now."

"That's in the hands of the Lord, Mr. Clements," Father Vincente said quietly. "Mr. Rocco died the day before yesterday."

THE END

IT'S SHEER MURDER

Is there no limit to the "Murder-Something-Or-Other" titles in recent flickers? First, there was "Murder, My Sweet." Now there's "Murder, He Says." Next week they'll probably have sequels to these two tagged "Murder, My Darling" and "Murder, She Says."

We wouldn't be a bit surprised if they made a flicker about the Brooklyn Dodgers "Murder Da Bums." All in favor say "Aye." Aw, shaddup ya lousy Giant fan, ya!

IT'S A GOOD TRICK

A bill was recently offered in a small town in England, calling for the building of a new jail. It was resolved that the new jail should be built on the exact site of the old spot and that the prisoners should *be incarcerated in the old jail until the new one was finished!*

Wilcey Earle

A Pair of Glasses

By CHARLES D.
RICHARDSON, JR.

Hiding out right next to the police station was a stroke of genius — but using old Dan McQueen was something else again!



SOMETIMES I wish I wasn't so pessimistic about things, but using a simple-minded gent like old Dan McQueen to tote food to a murderer made me jumpy.

I told my pal, Eddie Thatch, as much.

Eddie was six-foot-five and built like a brick garage, and that was why I hadn't cut him cold long ago. "You better shut your yap," Eddie advised. "Joe's got to eat, and old Dan's a natural for the job. Pass me the pickles."

Joe Gault, you see, was the big boss. Only he wasn't so big right now. He was hiding out in a tenement house smack alongside the police station. That's what got Joe so far in the numbers racket, his ability to outsmart the bulls. Nobody would ever suspect Joe of hiding out so close to the law.

"Old Dan's late," Eddie said, scowling.

We were now boarding at a lousy dump on Forty-Second Street. When we split up immediately following Joe's shooting and killing the jeweler on Fifth Avenue, we'd had it all planned. Me and Eddie would stay on the opposite side of town from Joe, and get somebody to take eats in to him twice daily. Joe Gault

was big and fat and twice a day was enough for him to fill his breadbasket. He didn't need any lunch.

The idea was to get somebody who wouldn't recognize Joe for what he was.

Old Dan McQueen filled the bill. Over seventy, and so near-sighted he couldn't read a newspaper if it was plastered on his nose. He didn't wear glasses because he couldn't afford them; that suited Joe Gault, for that way the old gent would never get wise who he was feeding.

The notes Joe sent us by way of Dan let us know how things were going. Old Dan, Joe wrote, would thump up the stairs and give three raps on the door. Then Dan would shuffle into the half-lit room and set the basket on the table. Joe sat in the shadows, but it wasn't necessary. Old Dan was like a bat in front of a thousand-watt spot.

I can remember the way the old bird's faded eyes lit up when we made the deal.

"By Judas!" he'd shrilled. "Now mebbe I'll be able to get me them new specs I've always wanted."

The old boy's aim in his remaining years was to see good again. Joe and the rest of us didn't worry none about that. It would take Dan months to

save up enough out of what we were paying him to afford glasses.

But we figured without the prospect of outside help.

OLD DAN plodded into our room one day around five-thirty. His seamed and whiskered face was split in a broad grin.

"It's come at last, gents," he said with emotion. "Tom Sharper up and done it."

Tom Sharper was an old fireman, a pal of Dan's. Eddie Thatch stared down at Dan from his six-foot-five.

"Did which?" he jerked.

Old Dan McQueen chuckled. "Glasses," he said happily. "New specs what'll make me see again as good as ever."

Eddie's cigarette dropped from his sagging lip.

Old Dan nodded. "Tom raised the money through friends. I'm to get fitted tonight at seven. Imagine bein' able to read and see people right. Ain't it wonderful!"

"Yeah," I said dismally.

Eddie only grunted.

We paid the old gent when he returned from Joe's hideout, and as his footsteps died on the stairs outside, Eddie already was putting on his coat. "He may get the glasses, but he won't wear 'em," Eddie said.

We hurried down and out into the street.

I shivered a little and it might have been the night air, but Eddie's big hands could really muss up a phone book when he wanted to show his strength. I didn't want another murder on our hands.

"Take it easy," I muttered, and then we were at the optician's.

We waited in a nearby alley mouth and I'll bet we were there a full hour before the bent shape of old Dan McQueen came out. Eddie Thatch pulled his cap down over his face and stepped before him.

Eddie didn't say anything, just picked the old gent up like a doll and whisked him into the darkness of the alleyway. Old Dan wasn't wearing the specs—I could see that in the cupped flare of the match I lit—but Eddie made a thorough job

of frisking. Old Dan's coat was ripped off, his pockets turned inside out. Eddie found the pair of horn-rimmed spectacles in the lining of the coat. There had been a hole in the inner pocket and the glasses had slipped through.

And all the time we held him, the old fool kept hollering, "My specs—don't break 'em, damn yuh! Don't you dare break 'em!"

Eddie ground the lenses beneath his heel, returned the empty frames to the coat lining. We let the old boy go, and shoved him from the alley.

THE next morning, old Dan came to our room for his pay. He didn't seem as stooped as usual, and there was a funny gleam in his faded eyes. "You get fitted for them glasses?" Eddie Thatch asked, curiously.

Old Dan McQueen set down his basket. "Coupla thugs beat me up," he mumbled. I could see his wrinkled hand shake in the light from the window.

"That's tough," said Eddie Thatch.

Old Dan wiped his forehead. There was sweat glistening there above his eyes. "Gents, I—" he began. "I hate to say it, but I'm afraid I can't do your chores no more after today."

"What!" Eddie was rising from his chair.

I stepped hastily between them. "What's wrong, Dan? Aren't we paying you enough? We'll be glad to give you an increase, won't we, Eddie?"

Eddie Thatch's six-foot-five was towering over the old man. "Listen, grandpa—"

Old Dan McQueen was edging to one side. "Sorry, gents," he said quietly, "but I ain't feedin' no murderer!"

Eddie's roar came simultaneously with the inward swing of the door of our room. Three bulls barged in, got us covered before we even could pull our guns. "About time you fellers showed up," Dan McQueen cracked, but he was grinning from ear to ear.

The bull slapping the cuffs on me

and the cursing Eddie, grunted. "You birds might have got away with it," he told the two of us, "if old Dan hadn't the kind of eyes he does. Some kind of vision which makes ordinary specs pretty useless. The eye doc had special lenses for Dan, gave him an ordinary pair to change off with. You birds destroyed the ordinary pair."

"Where's the others?" Eddie Thatch ground out.

"On his eyes," the bull said laconically. "Ever hear of contact lenses? They fit close to the eyeball and you

can't tell they're on. Dan was wearing them when he saw Joe Gault's picture in the paper. Soon's he saw Joe's face at the tenement, he came in to the station and notified us. Come on, jailbirds. Your pal is waiting for you in a nice, cool cell."

I looked at Eddie Thatch. "I told you we oughtn't of used Dan," I said.

"Shut your yap," Eddie growled.

Old Dan McQueen was reading the funny papers and laughing like a fool as the bulls and Eddie and me went out.

(THE END)

IT'S HUMAN TO ERR

He was a new man on the police force. When he was introduced to the other cops, they suppressed a chuckle, because McGinty did not appear to be too bright, and his wild talk about cleaning up the crooks in the city was evidently an attempt to cover up a decided inferiority complex.

After a long period of acclimation to his new duties with a fellow officer instructing, the sergeant called him over and said—"McGinty, starting tonight, you're on your own. Come with me and I'll show you the beat you are to cover."

After a short drive in a police car, McGinty and the sergeant stepped out on the curb.

"You're on the midnight tour," said the sergeant. "Your beat is from this barber shop to that red light on the corner."

"O. K., Sergeant," snapped McGinty, saluting smartly. "Crime will not pay on this beat!"

For four days, the station house heard nothing from McGinty. Finally, the sergeant and another cop decided to investigate. Driving along his beat, they could find neither hide nor hair of McGinty.

"Maybe he made a mistake and took the wrong beat," suggested the sergeant's companion.

"You've got something there," re-

plied the sergeant, "keep driving."

At long last, ten miles from his beat, they found McGinty, haggard and red-eyed from lack of sleep, wearily plodding along. "Migawd!" barked the sergeant, "what are you doing here? Your beat is at the other end of the city, from the barber shop to that red light on the corner."

"Red light on the corner my eye," came back the weary rejoinder. "That red light was on the back of a truck!"

NO WONDED HE OBJECTED

"Where were you on Thursday nite at 9 P. M.?" the defense attorney roared at the lovely lassie with the classy chassis, who was a State witness.

"Watching a movie," was the soft reply.

"And what were you doing on Friday nite at 9 P. M.?" persisted the lawyer.

Again the same soft response, "Watching a movie."

"And what are you doing tonite?" soothed the defense attorney.

"I object, Your Honor," cried the prosecuting attorney, as he leaped up livid with rage.

"Objection sustained!" ruled the Judge. Then he called the prosecutor aside and remarked, "Off the record, why did you object to that question?"

"Because I have already made a date with her myself for tonite!"

Wilcey Earle

Murder, Mamacita, Murder

By TALMAGE POWELL

Was it possible that so lazy a man as Manuel Batione would undertake such hardwork as murder?

POR DIOS, *amigo!* But Manuel Batione is not a lazy man. he is only tired. And the weather likely has something to do with it; for in Manuel's part of Texas—by bus three hours north of the muddy snake called the Rio Grande, and an equal distance west of the glittering blue waters of the Gulf—in that part of Texas, the weather itself conspires against a man of Manuel's temperament.

Even a man like Manuel Batione has no control over the elements. The summers are hotter than hot, with the mesquite growing tired and gnarled, the flat hands of the spiny cacti showing a thin ribbon of brown about their parched edges. In such weather a man must walk little, else the hot brown dust forms clouds beneath his feet, rising to choke his nostrils and sear his lungs. And what sensible man gives no thought to the well being of his lungs?

But if you still insist *amigo*, that Manuel is a lazy man, then you must know that he was in love. The *flor* of his eye was Rosita Lopez—and she was a rose, truly a rose. Long-limbed and lithe like the wheeling swallow, with a voice like the music of mission bells, lips that were petals torn from the reddest rose.

When her name was spoken, Manuel's stringy body straightened; his chest swelled; his eyes shone like drops of ink; his pulse raced in his neck, which, it must be truly said, reminded one of the neck of a plucked chicken.

Es verdad!—one would think that the lovely Rosita could never love

the unlovely Manuel. But who knows the workings of a woman's heart? And the eyes of love see many things ordinary eyes do not.

However, it was unfortunate that Madre Maria, the mother of Rosita, saw Manuel not with her daughter's perception. Madre Maria looked at Manuel and saw only a lazy man.

But even though he might never win Rosita, his *flor*, Manuel needed time to lie on his back beneath the cottonwood, watch the clouds drift by in the deep blue bowl of sky, and dream of Rosita Lopez. So you see, Manuel Batione was not really lazy. Only in love.

Now on the hotter than hot day of the murder—and murder is a harsh word in all truth to thrust at Manuel Batione; for he does not kill even the fat, innocent ants in his lean-to kitchen—on this day, Manuel assuredly could not be accused of being lazy. He was putting bright new strings on his guitar, and if one puts strings on a guitar and tunes it to sing of love, it is an exacting task, one for no lazy man.

His nimble fingers caressed the strings, and the golden sound that poured forth from the scarred, aged instrument brought a light to his eyes. He rose and entered his humble house, stooping to get beneath the low doorway, his sandaled feet scuffing the bare, hard earth of the floor.

In the gloom of this room were the bed — really a lumpy cot — the scratched table, the bookcase with the cracked glass front Manuel had salvaged in a forgotten, energetic



day. But the most striking furnishing of the room was the gilt crucifix upon the wall. No matter how tired his sighing muscles, never a day passed that Manuel did not lovingly dust his crucifix. Indeed, it showed much care, *amigo*.

With a glance into the room beyond, the kitchen with its rusty stove where he concocted his tortillas, Manuel turned and reached down a fly-specked cardboard box from the sagging shelf near the bed. From the box, he drew a length of deep

blue cloth, like silk, given him by *Senora Strickland*—a subtle bribe, Manuel suspected, since *Senor Strickland* had made Manuel an offer for his arid acres.

That had been only yesterday morning. Manuel had sat in the doorway, *Senor Strickland* towering over him, wearing a dark business suit, his body and heavy face bespeaking many generous servings of beef at the *Strickland* table.

"The place cost you nothing, Manuel," *Lance Strickland* had reminded. "Your whole possession—and look at it! Dust, sand, where even cactus refuses to grow! Why, you can't even find a jackrabbit on this place. A horned lizard, maybe, because like you, Manuel, he's too lazy to move off. And I'm offering you good money for it."

"You are right, *Senor Strickland*," Manuel had agreed, "but *Senor Ezra Macklin*—he give me the place, and I . . ."

"Hah!" *Strickland* had snorted, his paunch, shoulders and bald head quivering, "*Ezra Macklin* was laying helpless and that crazed bronco was about to stomp the life out of him. You were at *Macklin's*, puttering through what you called a day's work because you were out of beans. You saw *Macklin* and the bronc, and a miracle happened—you found a sudden burst of almost man-sized energy. You saved *Macklin's* life—and he gives you this place. Hah! And why? Because he'd been trying to give this neck of land away for years. He'd had to pay taxes on it because it was part of his spread. But nobody would have it, Manuel—because it ain't worth even the taxes!"

"But the tax," Manuel said, "she is paid. Manuel work that much, *Senor*."

Lance Strickland had given him a long look, clapped his beefy hand to his forehead. "And you're *loco* for doing it, Manuel! Plumb *loco*! I could have had this patch of rock and sand for the asking once, but I wasn't starting to raise blooded horses for the racing stables back east then. I didn't need room to build a training track, stables, and corrals. But I

need it now, and I'm offering money for this worthless piece of dirt *Ezra Macklin* panned off on you for a debt no man can pay. He's laughed behind your back about it, Manuel, dozens of times!"

Manuel had frowned and regarded the ground. "But sale of land, *Senor Strickland*, she takes so much trouble. Making the deed, going into town, seeing the lawyers. And the place, she is mine, all that Manuel have. No, *Senor*, I do not sell today. I am ver' tired. Adios, *Senor*."

Strickland had stared at him a moment, reddening. Then his quick spurt of anger cooled, and he clucked his tongue, shook his head sadly over Manuel, and strode off to the sleek coupe parked near the house.

But even so, Manuel smiled, now fondling the piece of blue rayon, he had gained; for only a few hours after *Lance Strickland* had left, his wife had driven by. "Just passing," she had explained, giving Manuel the cloth and the basket of food, and adding, "My husband might drop back to talk to you later about your place, Manuel. He thinks so very much of you."

"*Si, Senora; gracias, Senora!*" He had stood bowing while she drove away, her subtle hint echoing in his mind. Then he'd taken the food and cloth into the house. The food he divided into portions; by diligent eating, *amigo*, a man could get by three days without cooking with this much food. And the cloth he now made into a sash, slinging the guitar over his shoulder. He hummed the words he would sing to *Rosita Lopez* as he left the house. A queer beginning for murder, truly.

NOW *Rosita* and *Madre Maria* lived some distance down the hot road from Manuel. *Pablo Felipe Lopez*, *Rosita's* father, had been a sergeant in the army, killed in the first wave to hit the *Normandy* coast. His insurance was adequate to support *Rosita* and *Madre Maria*, supplemented by their earnings on part-time jobs that came along.

The *Madre* must not be judged too harshly, *amigo*, for what mother does

not wish the best for her daughter? Had Manuel been rich, or even tolerably fixed, his laziness might have been excused in the Madre's eyes. But laziness and poverty combined—*por Dios!* It was an unthinkable combination!

It was downright outrageous, in the Madre's mind, when she considered that Don Raquel Pulido was neither lazy nor poor. *Si*, he was also handsome; and if he were a bit arrogant, did not that mark the rich gentleman? And this foolish Rosita, pretending not to notice the way Don Raquel Pulido sent glances her way when he came by the house to pay court to her. Oh, that she had mothered such a foolish daughter!

The sun had covered a considerable distance in its march across the sky when Manuel at last approached the yard of the house of Rosita. The house was small, hemmed by a neat picket fence, with flowers carefully nurtured in washtubs and rings made of cast-away automobile tires. Often *turistas* driving by the concrete road, which flowed straight ahead without curve or hump until it vanished in the distance, would stop and enquire if some of the flowers might be for sale. It was that kind of small house.

Manuel drew up in the shade of the willow. Madre Maria was supposed to have gone in town today; so he was safe. And Rosita was humming in the house. He could hear her voice, soft, gentle, and he closed his eyes for a moment.

Then, his hand trembling on the frets of the guitar, he struck a liquid chord and began to sing: "Like the lark that is free, my sweet . . ."

He watched, and Rosita was suddenly framed in the door, drawn up slim and tall, her midnight hair framing her face.

But Manuel's voice faltered. Something was wrong. It was in the way she held her body, the frantic motions of her hands.

Then Rosita was jerked aside, and Madre Maria was before Manuel's wide eyes. She came across the yard toward the willow, her dark, wrinkled face a thunderhead.

Amigo, Madre Maria was only a

small woman, but TNT comes in small packages. Manuel backed away, his *guarachas*, woven from rope by his own hands, digging in the dust. But Madre Maria moved quickly.

She seized the sash of the guitar. The moment he had stood, stunned, had been an ill mistake. Madre Maria tore the guitar from his hands. "Pig! Loathsome loafer! Get back to your sand and *arroyos!* I 'ave warn you the last time to stay away from my Rosita."

Rosita had not stood idle. She ran up, took her mother's arm. "Please, Madre Maria . . ."

"Silence!" The Madre had a voice, for one so small and seemingly frail. "You will go back in the house!"

Rosita entreated Manuel with her eyes; eyes now like a doe's when the hunter nears. They were in complete accord, Rosita and Manuel, in their love and hopelessness; for what could one do with the woman standing between them?

"But the town . . ." Manuel began.

"The town?" Madre Maria shrieked. "*Si!* So you come like the thief to steal my Rosita! Don Raquel Pulido is coming today—so I do not go to town. Off with you—and you, Rosita my little one, into the house! You must look nice for Don Raquel!"

"But *mamacita* . . ."

"Yes, Madre Maria . . ."

"You would argue with me?" Madre Maria demanded. And outraged, she swung the guitar. Manuel had no time to duck, and the faithful guitar made a whanging noise—such a tortured discord, *amigo*—as it struck Manuel's dusty sombrero. The sombrero crumpled, and Manuel staggered. Rosita sobbed, and the broken guitar lay in the dust, so forlorn.

IT WAS thus that they were standing when they heard the laugh. A liquid, arrogant laugh of a powerful one. Don Raquel came riding up on a velvet black stallion. He swung from the horse near the willow.

"*Buenos tardes*, Madre Maria."

"Likewise," Madre Maria gushed, turning toward Don Raquel and giving Manuel a kick in the shins as

she turned. Rosita clenched her hands and ran into the house. Don Raquel strode up, glancing back at Rosita's disappearing figure. "I see the weather is bothering her, Madre Maria."

"*Si, si!* But I talk to her, Don Raquel. The child obeys its parent." With one last look, her gaze gushing venom at Manuel, Madre Maria hurried after Rosita.

Don Raquel touched the broken guitar with the toe of his hand-tooled boot. "Some places are dangerous for some men, Manuel Batiane."

"As the *Americanos* say, you said it, Don Raquel!" Manuel returned hotly. Their eyes met, locked, and many thoughts filled Manuel's mind; thoughts perhaps comparing himself to Don Raquel, perhaps thoughts of what Don Raquel could do for Rosita, and how little he, Manuel, could do. And so his gaze dropped; he bent wearily and picked up his guitar. His steps were heavy, trudging, and Don Raquel's laugh followed him.

If possible, Manuel's sagging shack looked more dismal than ever. He crossed the yard slowly, the broken guitar dangling from his hand. The walk back had been ever so long, for a man does not walk lightly with agonized frustration his travelling companion, especially a man who is tired.

Manuel looked ahead to the empty days that stretched before him, and considered desperate measures, such as pickling himself in tequila. But to work an hour to buy a drink of tequila that is gone in seconds, in one short swallow—such is not a wise trade, *amigo*, especially if one is tired and in love and bearing the burden of hopelessness.

Then he entered his house, and the guitar slipped from his fingers. His Adam's apple worked in his throat. Breath wheezed out of him. Because the corpse was lying right on the earthen floor—and such a corpse!

A fairly young man whom Manuel had never seen before. He had been very thoroughly scalped, and it was horrible with the blood in a wide pool and the hatchet lying near his head, utterly horrible.

Manuel moved like the man on the tight wire at the circus. By inches

he went nearer the dead man, chills pouring over his hot, sweating body. The hatchet he recognized, as that coming from the tool chest which had been in the house when he had moved in to inhabit it those many months ago. His eyes strayed to the chest in the corner. He was right. The padlock of the chest was open, hanging in the hasp.

He touched the man, but the pockets were empty. Strange. A man dressed in this expensive suit should have been carrying money, papers, at least a wallet.

Manuel closed his eyes to shut out the sight of the blood, and buried his chin in his palm. His mind ticked like a runaway clock. He had never seen the man before; the man had no business being here, murdered. He had no explanation to make to the authorities which would suffice without a great deal of investigating and trouble. And Madre Maria, when she learned a dead man had been found in Manuel's house. . . *Quita alla!*

The solution, of course, was simple. He would hide the weapon to get rid of it permanently later, and take the body to a spot where it would cause less trouble. The blood on the floor was a simple matter; one could always throw more earth and tramp it down. *Si*, that was the answer to this new, utterly horrible problem.

THE bulk of the dead man had the magical effect of melting the tiredness from Manuel's muscles. He picked up the hatchet, considered; then climbed on his lumpy bed and reached over his head. He laid the bloody hatchet on top of the rafter. *Si*, a good hiding place. No one would think of looking in such an obvious spot.

He touched the dead man again, the hands this time, gripping them to pull the body out the door. If only he were not seen, and could get the body in his decaying, wooden wheel barrow. . . .

It was at that point, that he heard the car stop outside his house. He stood quivering, frozen, unable to

move. Trapped with this dead man. No time to hide the body—and no place to run. More than utterly horrible.

Truly he had the tiger by the tail, and he was still holding the dead man's hands, frozen with indecision and the cold lump that lay in his quivering stomach, when the car door slammed outside and the shadow threw its length over the doorway of the house. Manuel turned his head like the puppet on the tight string. The sight of Sheriff Jed Conally and the gun in Conally's lean, tanned hand washed the strength from Manuel's shuddering knees.

"Well," Conally drawled, "well!" He stepped inside the room, a tall, grizzled, Texas sheriff. Strictly poison to lawbreakers, *amigo*. "I see the phone tip was right, Manuel. Somebody passed your place and said over the phone they had seen a dead body. I didn't put much stock in it—but this. . . Looks like you've sure hung yourself, Manuel!"

"Hung myself?" Manuel touched his neck, his flesh crawling, feeling strangely like a gliding rope. "But *Senor Conally* you can't believe. . ."

Conally's mouth tightened as he stooped to examine the scalped corpse. He patted the pockets. "Who is he, Manuel?"

"In all truth, *Senor Sheriff*, I know as little of this as you!"

Conally cocked his furrowed gaze at Manuel a moment; then he began glancing about the humble abode of Manuel. Something protruding from the edge of the lumpy cot mattress caught his eye. He tossed the mattress back. *Dinero, amigo!* Goodness, the money that was hidden under the mattress. Ten dollar bills and five dollar bills, and even a few twenties. All of perhaps two hundred dollars. And the dead man's wallet was there. It could have been no one else's wallet. Manuel's eyes bugged, and the slithering feeling about his scrawny neck tightened until it was difficult to draw breath.

Grim, silent, Jed Conally thumbed through the wallet. "Henry Lawrence," he mused, "geologist. Works for the Rutherford B. Withering Company. So this Henry Lawrence

drops in on you, Manuel, perhaps to ask the way. You see his money, and being such a lazy man, you are overly open to temptation. You might have got away with it, too, Manuel."

"But, *Senor*," Manuel pleaded. "I can prove. . ." But could he? He had walked very slowly back from Rosita's house. If he had walked faster he might have been here in time to rob this young Henry Lawrence and murder him. He could prove nothing that way. . .

His lips were making words without any sound coming out. Jed Conally moved closer to him, his eyes as cold as the belly of the flounder. Conally clicked handcuffs on his thin wrists. "I find the money hidden in your house, Manuel. I catch you red-handed getting ready to hide the corpse. You better watch what you say, Manuel. You're under arrest for murder!"

Manuel could only shudder.

THE jail in Brayton was not a nice place. A low, flat-roofed building of baked brick that was like an oven; small cells which one shared with various vermin. Conally pounded questions at Manuel, finally giving up in disgust without learning what Manuel had done with the murder weapon or getting a confession of murder from the quaking Manuel.

Finally, Conally strode out of the cell, and Manuel dropped on the cot and buried his face in his hands. Perhaps he sobbed a little. He had now lost all hope of winning Rosita; Madre Maria would gloat to her daughter in triumph, pointing out that lazy men were also murderers, and Rosita, crushed, would spend the rest of her unhappy days with the arrogant Don Raquel Pulido. While Manuel. . . What was left for Manuel? Only disgrace, shame—and a coffin, *amigo!*

He looked up as the lock grated. The cell door swung wide, and a lean, stooped man with a narrow face and shock of graying hair stepped past sheriff Conally to enter the cell.

"'Ello, *Senor Ezra Macklin*," Manuel said, rising. Jed Conally muttered, "You can have a few minutes,

Ezra, with him," locked the cell door back and went toward his office.

Ezra Macklin laid his hand on Manuel's shoulder. "Well, Manuel, you are certainly in a jam."

"Si, *Senor!*"

"The whole town is rocking with news of murder," Macklin sat on the cot and began stuffing cut plug in his pipe. "I've always liked you, Manuel." He waited for that to take effect.

"*Gracias!*" Manuel said.

Macklin scratched a match on the concrete floor, applied fire to his pipe. "I gave you the place you're living on now, Manuel. I'd still like to help you."

"And I will never forget your goodness, *Senor!*" Manuel assured him. "But help? I do not need it, *Senor!* They will never hang Manuel!"

Ezra Macklin's narrow brow furrowed. "Let's hope not. But from what the sheriff said. . ."

"Si, but I've the secret." Manuel looked out the door of the cell, making sure Conally had returned out front to his office. He dropped on the cot beside Macklin. "Here in jail, *Senor* Macklin, I get good food, a place to rest the tired bones—and when it is over, Manuel will be the free man!"

Macklin shook his head. "I've heard the talk of lazy men before. . . I hope you got a good one up your sleeve, Manuel."

"Si! The weapon—that is what you call the crux, *Senor!* Sheriff Conally find me even before I've time to hide the body. Will the jury believe I yet have time to hide the weapon?"

"I don't quite. . ."

"I know—but only listen! The weapon, she is hidden in my house," Manuel whispered. "I tell the jury the truth—all but that. They understand that I am scared, finding the body, and wish rid of it. They understand that does not make me guilty."

"But the money Conally found, Manuel."

"I tell the jury perhaps there was lots of *dinero*. Only part was left to make me look bad and let the true murderer *vamoose* without sus-

picion. The money does not convict me, *Senor!* Only the weapon would do that! And since they think I have no time to hide the weapon, I tell them what you think? Since the weapon is gone, it was carried away, carried away by the one who really murdered *Senor* Henry Lawrence! I then have a chance, for in this country you are innocent, *Senor!* until proven guilty! And the weapon being gone—it will leave a doubt in the mind of a jury—and a hung jury, *Senor!* is just as good as one which votes, every man, to let you go free."

"You might," Macklin breathed. "You might pull it at that!"

"Si, *Senor!* No weapon, no final proof. A weapon, and the goose of Manuel is cooked!"

Ezra Macklin rose. "Anyhow luck to you. I just dropped around to let you know that a lot of us still think a heap of you, Manuel."

"*Gracias!*" They shook hands and Macklin left.

HE HAD gone perhaps fifteen minutes when Jed Conally again strode back to the cell, followed by the corpulent Lance Strickland. "Another visitor, Manuel," Connally said, ushering Strickland in. Conally went back to his office. Strickland clasped his pudgy hands behind him, walked about the cell. "You're in a jam, Manuel. Hah! You'll need money for lawyers. I still need a little more room, a place to build a training track, stables, and corrals. I guess you're ready to sell that worthless hunk of land?"

"No, *Senor* Strickland. Thank you, but Manuel does not need money. Manuel so ver' tired."

Strickland drew up short, his gaze scathing. "Hah! In jail, charged with murder, the most heinous crime known to man—and still too lazy to bother with a land sale."

Manuel gulped, stopped the chattering of his teeth, and said, "Manuel is not afraid. Manuel does not need money. Manuel will come clear."

"Not from what I've heard!"

"Si, but I've the secret! You will not tell?"

Strickland regarded Manuel, hesitating, but the gleam in Manuel's

eyes was too much. "I'll keep my mouth shut." Strickland bent closer to listen.

"The weapon," Manuel whispered, "is hidden in my house—but they think I have not time to hide such. So I tie the jury up—the weapon is gone, so it must have been carried away, by the man who really murdered *Senor* Henry Lawrence!"

He went into further detail, and finally Strickland straightened. "It just might work," he acknowledged, "but you'll still need lawyers. You'll sell now?"

"No, *Senor*. I am so ver' tired." Manuel lay back on the cot and closed his eyes. Strickland waited a moment, said "Hah" unpleasantly, and called for Jed Conally. Manuel cocked one eye to watch Strickland leave.

The waiting, *amigo*, was utterly awful; Manuel perspired and the flesh of his neck crawled while the sun dropped low in the heavens. He dined on tamales and beans prepared by Jed Conally's wife, the food which he liked so well like rough wheat husks in his stomach. He watched darkness seep down upon the earth and knew it was time. He called Jed Conally back to the cell. Conally stood outside, close to the bars, and said, "Well, I guess you're ready to talk, Manuel?"

"No, *Senor*. I am going to ask the favor. Even more than the favor. It is your duty, *Senor*!"

Conally's eyes narrowed. "Well?"

"You must go to my house. Now. You must not allow yourself to be seen; you must wait. Sometime after dark a man will enter my house, *Senor*. He will be hunting the murder weapon to cook well my goose. He will be the murderer, *Senor*!"

CONALLY stroked his cheek with his knuckles. "I think I already got the murderer, Manuel."

"But can you gamble a man's life on what you think? I am not convicted yet, *Senor*! You are sworn to uphold the law. It will be so ver' little trouble, and you cannot take the chance that you are letting a murderer go free while convicting an innocent man!"

"I guess I can't at that. I don't know what you're thinking, but I'll drive out there—and if this is a wild goose chase, I'll bust your nose. Manuel Batione!"

"*Senor*, if this is the goose chase wild, I will not care if you also black my eyes!"

Truly, *amigo*, this period of waiting was *miserable*! Manuel closed his eyes and tried to project himself to his humble house. He tried to vision a skulking creature nearing, Jed Conally drawing his gun. But he visioned only Jed Conally's growing impatience, Conally returning to break his nose and black his eyes and convict him of murder. . . .

He aged centuries in the next four hours, with the crickets beginning to bleat and the great, Texas moon rising. He lay limp, wrung dry, so tired from waiting.

Then a shadow came toward the cell. It was not Conally. It was a deputy. The deputy unlocked the cell, held his gun on Manuel, and said, "The sheriff wants you to come out in the front office for a minute. But don't try nothing—this thing's got a hair trigger!"

"*Si, Senor. Si!*"

Jed Conally stood near his cluttered desk in his office. In the chair facing him was Ezra Macklin. Macklin was saying, "I'll have your badge for this, Conally!"

And Conally was firing back: "The fact remains that I found you prowling in Batione's house, and he ain't psychic. We're going to see what he's got on his mind."

"Murder, *Senor*, murder!" Manuel said from the doorway. "She's a heavy load to carry on the mind. I knew you'd find *Senor* Macklin, but I did not say so, for you think I was crazy and maybe not go out to my house."

"Listen, you lazy tramp. . ." Macklin began.

"You listen, *Senor*," Manuel said. "You 'ave committed the murder of *Senor* Henry Lawrence! You did not wish him to tell me what he came to tell me. You wanted my land back—land which you gave me, *Senor*, for saving your life, like a selfish man giving away a blind,

crippled horse that can work no more but only eat and cost him *dinero*; in your greed you now wanted the land back. Perhaps Henry Lawrence came to you first and that is how you knew before I had a chance to know. You stalled with *Senor* Henry Lawrence, but at last had to tell him who owned the land now. But you knew I had always felt in your debt and would never sell the land to anyone else. You knew I would give the land back when I knew the goose of me was cooked. So you planned to let the murder of Henry Lawrence take care of everything, also leaving you completely beyond the cloud of suspicion. You were ver' smart man!"

Macklin leaped to his feet. "This lazy bum's crazy—completely *loco*. Conally. You're not going to. . ."

"I'm going to hear what he's got to say," Conally said coldly. "Sit down, Macklin." Macklin sat back weakly, said, "I guess you can prove all this, Manuel Batione?"

"I can begin, *Senor*. The sheriff he will finish—and a man like you—such a man will talk when the pressure she gets tough. You see, I lay the trap with the weapon. You see a chance that the goose of me will not be cooked, so you go after the weapon at night when you will not be seen to put it where the sheriff will find it to finish cooking my goose. That is the beginning of proof. The next point, *Senor*, is the tool chest which the hatchet—the murder weapon—came. You give me the place, *Senor*, and the tool chest was there. An old, worthless chest, with only one or two rusty old tools, not worth hauling away. But you remember the chest, following Henry Lawrence to my house and talking with him. You unlock the chest without *Senor* Henry Lawrence suspecting your intentions until too late. That was your slip, *Senor* Macklin, trying to cook my goose so well—*unlocking* the chest."

"You had a key, damn you!" Macklin half rose.

"You *think* I had a key," Manuel corrected. "But I am ver' tired man. I throw the key away shortly after I move in the house. I can prove

such by my Rosita—and even Madre Maria who blessed me out for being such a tired man. Only *you* had a key, *Senor* Macklin!"

Macklin slumped back in his chair; his face was very ghastly. *amigo*. He licked his lips, said to Jed Conally, "I . . . I'll make a deal. . . I'll talk. . . if I can beat a first degree charge. "

Conally gave an order. and Macklin was led shuffling back to a cell. Conally faced Manuel, said, "But still I don't see why. . ."

IT WAS at that point, *amigo*, that the door opened and Rosita came running in. Close on her heels was Madre Maria, her face livid. Rosita was no sooner in Manuel's arms than Madre Maria jerked her back. "Stay away from the pig—the murderer! You foolish daughter!"

"But I am no murderer, Madre Maria," Manuel said. "The real bad one is back in a cell now."

Conally nodded corroboration. But only a little of the black and blue left Madre Maria's face. "You are still the son of a . . ."

She was saved from further blasphemy by the door opening. The man who strode forward was a stranger. A portly, well-tailored man who fairly exuded wealth and the big city, *amigo*. He said, "I have been told that Manuel Batione. . ."

"I am he," Manuel said.

"I am Rutherford B. Withering," the portly man said. "Of Withering and Withering, Investors. A geologist that we hired has been murdered, I understand. Sad case, sad case. Did Henry Lawrence tell you before he was killed of our offer?"

"He never had the chance, *Senor* Withering."

"Well, even though you. . . that is. . . charged with. . ."

"You can talk to him all right," Conally told Withering. "Manuel ain't killed anybody."

"Fine, fine! Mr. Batione, my company is prepared to offer a quarter of a million dollars for your place!"

Stunned silence fell. Madre Maria puckered her lips in her first smile at Manuel.

Conally breathed, "For what?"

"Oil rights, I am betting," Manuel said, "since *Senor* Henry Lawrence was a geologist."

"That's correct," Withering assented. "We went to Ezra Macklin first, thinking he owned the land, the reason you did not know of our survey."

A new voice came from the doorway. "Hah!" It was Lance Strickland. He came forward, glancing from Manuel to Withering. "What has this man been telling you, Manuel? I'll give you a hundred thousand for your place."

"So you do not need a training track after all, *Senor* Strickland?" Manuel smiled. "That is much too high a price for a training track. *Senor* Withering has already offered a quarter of a million."

"Four hundred thousand! Hah!" bawled Strickland.

"Half a million," said Rutherford B. Withering calmly.

"Six hundred thousand," Strickland said shakily.

"Seven hundred," Rutherford B. Withering examined his nails.

"I can't beat it," Strickland croaked.

It was at this point, *amigo*, that Madre Maria squealed, flung her arms about Manuel's neck, and kissed him soundly. But he pushed the Madre aside and said to Withering, "You must make it eight hundred

thousand."

Withering frowned. "Sorry. I can't. . ."

"Then I do not sell," Manuel said flatly.

"Pig! Fool! Ingrate!" shrilled Madre Maria.

Withering looked at Manuel's set face, said reluctantly, "All right, eight hundred thousand dollars. But not a penny higher."

The Madre's jaw dropped, and she kissed Manuel again. He said, "Madre Maria, the extra hundred thousand I wanted for you."

"For me? Ah, but you will make a good son-in-law, Manual Batione! A hundred thousand *Americano* dollars for me?"

"Si," Manuel said. "It will keep you quite comfortable—in a home of your own." His hand found Rosita's hand, small and warm and soft. He glanced at the people about him. "There are many ways of moving the burro," he mused, "the simplest of which is to light a fire under his tail."

Then he led Rosita toward the door and the soft night outside. You might suspect, *amigo*, that he intended to kiss her.

Por Dios, amigo! But Manuel Batione is not a lazy man. Only smart. . .

(THE END)

IT WAS A PROPER REQUEST

It was a first degree murder case. The famous defendant was so palpably guilty that the big city's newspapers already had their headlines set in bold, black type: "Jones Guilty Of First Degree Murder."

To the judge's consternation, the foreman of the jury told him that the jury was unable to agree on a verdict.

The legalite sent for the jury, sternly reproved them and added, "The issues in this case are pretty clear-cut. Now, go back into that jury room and come out with a proper verdict. If you don't reach an issue before 7 P.M.,

I'll have twelve suppers sent in to you, cold ones, do you hear?"

The jury filed slowly out of the judge's chambers back into their own jury room. As the foreman reached the door, he looked back over his shoulder and remarked to the judge—"Your Honor, will you make that eleven hot suppers and one bale of hay?"

SHADES OF JOHN PAUL JONES

Those two gents arrested on a Peeping Tom charge in Philadelphia offered a very unique alibi for their actions, "We hadn't begun to sight yet."

Wilcey Earle

The Darkness Killer

DETECTIVE Sergeant Matt Foley looked over the top of the newspaper and his eyes were somber. He gazed straight at youthful-looking Roger Wharton, crime reporter for that same newspaper.

Foley said, "So that's what you believe about me. The truth as you see it. Now wait before you start explaining; let me read this item just to refresh your memory."

Foley cleared his throat and glanced back at the paper. He read slowly, without particular emphasis, but Roger Wharton squirmed more and more uncomfortably in his chair.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT FOLEY TRIGGER HAPPY?

Last night, Detective Sergeant Matt Foley, who outrivals the famous Sheriffs of the Old West, killed his fourth man. John Allison, ex-convict, died under Sergeant Foley's gun. As three other men died. All crooks and evil. We do not hold that Sergeant Foley hasn't done his duty, but it seems to us that he might try shooting with intent to render his opponent unable to fight, instead of shooting to kill. We prophesy that Sergeant Foley will one day shoot and kill the wrong man.

Roger Wharton tried to summon a smile. "Now understand me, Sarge. I did write that, but I don't believe in it. My editor told me what to write. You know we run a crusading newspaper; we needle people all the time. It's good for circulation, but there was nothing personal in that article."

"It just calls me a killer, that's all." Foley unlimbered his big frame as he arose. "Why didn't you go further and tell why I killed those four men? I had to. It was them or me, and you don't stop to try and wing a man who is intent on gunning you

out. You shoot and shoot to kill. A wounded man with a gun can fight back."

"Yes. Yes, I know all that." Wharton sighed. "I'm sorry; I didn't want to write it. Maybe some day you'll pinch someone you don't want to arrest—but you'll do it because that's your job. Above you are lieutenants and captains and inspectors. You take their orders just as I take an editor's orders."

Foley dropped the newspaper on the table. He grinned broadly.

"It's okay, Roger. I was kidding you a little. I know what your rag is like, always gunning for-somebody. I wish, though, you'd stick to smearing people like that Darkness Burglar. Incidentally, he's a tough guy. You've been riding him pretty hard. Watch yourself."

Wharton shrugged. "I've been expecting him almost any time. No clues—nothing as to his identity?"

"Not a solitary thing," Foley replied. "But we always know when he pulls a job. First, he selects victims living in a private home, people who have been to some ritzy party and wearing jewels. He knows the gems must be in the house, so he waits until they are asleep. Then he cuts the electric light wires, breaks in and works with a powerful flashlight. He sees everybody and everything, but he is never seen himself. All we know is that he's a big guy—and tough."

WHARTON nodded. "I know. He wakes up the people in the house, orders them to produce the valuables and if they stall, he beats them half to death. Tell you what—land him and I'll write the most glowing praise of you that ever appeared in any paper. Even my editor couldn't prevent that."

Foley looked around Wharton's neat three-room apartment. "I'm doing my best, Roger. Capturing that guy is my one assignment, but I'm not getting very far. Say—

The newspapers called Matt Foley trigger-happy, said that some day he'd kill the wrong man. Now it seemed as if someone were out to make that prophecy come true!



Foley saw a familiar-looking figure rise behind his attacker.

★ By NORMAN A. DANIELS ★

where's that shrunken head I saw on your table last week?"

Wharton shuddered. "Oh—that! It really was the head of a human being, you know. I couldn't stand having it around so I—got rid of the thing. Nobody should be so gruesome as to keep an object like that. Wait a minute. I'm going to Headquarters with you."

Foley said, "I'll go part way. I'm off tonight and headed home. Just dropped in for a minute to kid you. And, incidentally, to ask you one question."

"I'll answer anything I can, Sarge."

"Do you think there's a chance that Attorney Sam Ellis or that reformer, Horace Russell, are getting next to your editor? I mean by that, are they behind the kind of stories written about me lately? Neither of those guys like me much."

Wharton pursed his lips for a moment. "I never thought of that, Sarge; I'll try to find out. Attorney Ellis is sore because two of the lugs you shot were his clients—real money-makers so far as he was concerned. Horace Russell just abhors violence and thinks cops ought to overpower poor little crooks by tapping 'em on the wrist."

"Horace Russell has more motive than that," Foley grunted. "One of those birds I had to plug happened to be a Great Experiment on Russell's part. He was recreating him into a worthy citizen and believed his experiment was working. Oh well, there are always crackpots. Only I seem to meet most of 'em."

Wharton slammed the apartment door and mechanically rattled it to make certain the spring latch had caught. They walked out together, covered half a dozen blocks and then Wharton turned off to make his way to Headquarters and his night crime beat.

Sergeant Foley lit a fresh cigar and proceeded in another direction. He didn't want to see Headquarters until eight in the morning; he'd spent too much time there lately, hoping for some break. It was plain luck that the Darkness Burglar hadn't killed anyone; he'd come close on two occasions.

DELIBERATELY, Foley put all thought of crime out of his mind. He enjoyed the early Spring evening. It had been a tough winter and he thought he'd shovelled more snow from around his cottage than any man had even done in history. Then too, Martha had suffered from a severe cold all winter and part of the housework had fallen on Foley's shoulders. All this—and the Darkness Burglar too, had almost driven him into a nervous frenzy.

He didn't actually see the man, just his shadow. The luck that stood behind his shoulder in these cases, was there again. Foley noticed the man's shadow across the sidewalk. He stood behind a big elm, but a street threw light to create a shadow.

Foley's mind told him that innocent people don't conceal themselves behind trees on a dark suburban street. Foley was reaching for his hip-holstered gun when the man stepped into the open. He had a revolver in his hand and it was being rapidly raised.

For one instant Foley believed his luck had run out. This man positively had the drop on him. He kept going for his gun though. As he raised it, the stranger's weapon clicked twice in rapid succession. Misfires. But the next cartridge might go off.

Foley's service pistol flamed; the stranger gave one short screech as he was hurtled back a step by the heavy slug. Then he fell and rolled close to a tall, thick hedge. Foley started toward the man. Still twenty yards away, he saw the hedge part. Arms, shoulders and a man's head appeared. The hands scrambled, seized the weapon from the gunman's hand and then promptly withdrew. Foley blinked rapidly. It seemed like part of some dream. He had a vague glimpse of this corpse robber's face and it looked strangely familiar.

Then Foley started running and his gun came up again. But he was too late; whoever had stolen that gun was gone, faded into the darkness. Windows were going up. Distantly, a patrolman's whistle came through the night.

Moments later, Foley faced burly

Captain Clark, his superior. Foley was sweating badly.

"For the fifth time, I shot him. He's dead. I don't know who he is, but he was waylaying me. He had a gun and he tried to fire. I had to shoot him. What was I to do, rush a gun pointed right at me?"

"No, Matt," Captain Clark said patiently. "I believe every word you say; you're clear-headed and cool. But if this man tried to kill you, where is his gun? This won't make very nice reading in the report I have to file."

"Someone—I don't know who—was hidden on the other side of the hedge. He scrambled through the hedge and got the gun, got away too. He. . . hey, Roger Wharton, come over here."

Wharton hurried up to Foley. The detective-sergeant eyed him critically.

"Roger, I know this is all nonsense, but the man who swiped that gun was in the light for about a tenth of a second. He looked a devil of a lot like you. I wondered why he seemed familiar. Now, you wouldn't. . .?"

Captain Clark broke in. "Matt, this killing is beginning to get you. Wharton was at Headquarters when the first alarm came in. He was there ten minutes before that."

FOLEY passed a hand across his eyes. "I know. I'm being foolish. Did anybody identify the dead man yet?"

"No. He looks like a hoodlum," Clark said. "There were two hundred dollars in his pockets. You might construe that as blood money, paid him to kill you—if only there were a gun. Or, if it really did vanish, or the guy fired it so we could do a paraffin test on his hands and prove he actually did have a gun, things would be different."

"There was a gun," Foley insisted. "He tried to shoot it, but the thing wouldn't fire. A guy was planted to swipe that rod. This is a frame, Sarge. For some reason, somebody wants me discredited or demoted or even heaved out of the department."

"I don't know," Clark wagged his

head. "The whole thing seems so damned odd. What is there to think, Matt? Nothing except that you saw this man, jumped to the conclusion he meant to kill you and you shot him. Then you realized he had no gun—you must have been mistaken—but you needed a story."

"That's just how it looks," Foley admitted. "Am I suspected or anything?"

Clark shrugged. "Under the circumstances I won't throw any rank at you now. But when the Inspector and the Commissioners find out—well, anything can happen."

Wharton and Foley walked away from the group. The reporter's shoulders sagged, his voice was toneless.

"Sarge, they're going to force me to follow this up to the hilt. That story of mine predicted you'd kill the wrong man some day—and here it is. I want you to know that I believe anything you tell me, but I won't be able to say so in the story I'll have to write."

Foley said grimly, "When I ferret out whoever pulled this on me, you'll have another story, a beaut. I'm sorry about that crazy identification I made, but that guy did look like you, sort of."

"Forget it," Wharton shrugged. "Got any ideas, Sarge?"

"One." Foley rubbed his chin slowly. "Whoever did this, had a motive. He got that mug I killed to cut me down, paid him, and handed him a gun that wouldn't work. He knew my gun would and after the whole thing was through, I'd be in a tough spot. The least that can happen to me is a demotion and when you strip a detective sergeant of rank, where does he go? On a beat as a patrolman."

"But why is anyone afraid of you, Sarge?"

"It's the Darkness Burglar, of course. I haven't worked on anything else in months; I must be very close to him. He has friends maybe, though he could have rigged this whole thing by himself. At any rate, he must be behind it. If only I knew why he thinks I'm so near his

heels. I'm not, you know. I'm still miles away."

"What about Attorney Ellis and Horace Russell, Sarge?"

Foley said, "I need your help. Find out where they were at the time of the shooting. I'm going to recheck on the Darkness Burglar's tracks: the McNally house which he robbed last week. It's the only place he ever tackled that was unoccupied. I've studied the place for clues, but I'm going to restudy it. Fact is, we're not even sure what was stolen there. The McNallys are in Mexico and won't be back for a couple of days."

"I'll get busy on Ellis and Russell," Wharton promised. "Good luck with landing some fresh clue. I . . . here comes Captain Clark again and he looks as if he had news."

CLARK said, "Matt, one of the boys just recognized the man you killed. He's a cheap little punk who was arrested a couple of months ago for a stickup. Attorney Ellis got him off, but the arresting officer says he remembers the man. That helps—a little, I guess. You might expect that mug to be up to no good."

"Not much, though," Foley said wryly. "The man is dead. All sympathy will be in his favor, but thanks anyhow."

Wharton whistled softly a moment later. "A mug whom Attorney Ellis defended. That makes sense in regards to your theory, Sarge."

"Find out what you can," Foley urged. "I'll be at your apartment later. I've got to work fast and have something to report by the time they take up my case."

Foley telephoned home first, reassuring his wife because he knew she'd get the news on radio broadcasts. Then he hurried to the elaborate home of the McNallys. Foley had a key which the caretaker had provided following the robbery. He let himself in and turned on the lights. The juice had never been cut off.

Once more, he went over the house, room by room. The Darkness Burglar had been too lucky. It was time that his luck fell out and he left be-

hind him some slim clue that might be developed.

Some of the rooms had been so thoroughly ransacked that they looked as if a wrecking crew had gone to work here. One room, given to curios picked up by the McNallys in their travels, wasn't badly damaged. The place had a gruesome aspect, with ceremonial swords and daggers hanging on the walls; South American blow guns neatly cased and some wicked looking machetes.

But here, as usual, the Darkness Burglar had worked carefully. He was never without gloves, left no telltale cigarette butts or buglar tool marks which might be traced to him.

After an hour of this, Foley gave up. He decided to telephone Captain Clark, just in case something new had developed on that hoodlum who was probably in the morgue by now.

Clark had news. Not about the man whom Foley had killed, but of a fresh death. A deliberate murder.

Clark said, "That Darkness Burglar again! He visited the home of Paul Gates, the financier—used his customary methods and got Gates out of bed. He tried to force him to open a safe, but Gates rebelled. The Darkness Burglar worked on him, as he did with all his other victims. Gates was dead when we got there."

Foley made a note of the address. "I'm going over, Captain. Maybe I can't do much, but before they break me to some remote beat, I want to devote all my time to tracking down this man. Now that he's a killer, he'll be worse than ever. He won't care whether or not he kills again."

THE Paul Gates home was one of those places with two dozen rooms, big shade trees, massive furniture and servants. Foley talked to a nephew of the dead man.

The nephew was still stunned by it all, still frightened. "All I know is that I heard a shout. I woke up and ran to Uncle Paul's room. Everyone else was there, except the servants who sleep in another wing and can't hear anything that happens here. There was a man behind a strong flashlight. He had a gun and

I backed against the wall with the others."

"Take me to that room," Foley ordered. "Was your uncle killed there?"

"No, sir. The burglar forced all of us into a large clothes closet and locked the door. He took Uncle Paul to the upstairs study, where the wall safe was. We broke out later. Uncle Paul lay on the floor below the open safe. It was looted."

The body was gone when Foley reached the room, but the medical examiner was packing up.

"What killed him, Doc?" Foley asked.

"Any of a dozen vicious blows, Sergeant. They were administered with the butt of a gun, I think, and each one was deliberately struck with the intent to kill."

Foley pursed his lips. "That's odd. The Darkness Burglar usually didn't want to kill. All he wanted was to force his victim to open a safe or show where the valuables were hidden."

"He did that too." The Medical Examiner shrugged. "Mr. Gates was tortured first and then the blows were struck. He put up a good fight. His hands were bloody around the nails. Undoubtedly, he'd scratched the murderer badly. And one more little thing. After the body was lifted, I found this beneath it."

He extended a thin gold ring with some sort of embossed coat of arms on a small panel. Foley held the ring beneath the light. He'd seen it before and he suddenly remembered where. Roger Wharton had worn a ring similar to this.

Foley turned to the nephew again. "I want you to understand one thing. The Darkness Burglar never killed before. In fact, he took pains to avoid being listed as a murderer. The death of your uncle seems to have been quite deliberate. Suppose we assume, for the moment, that someone else who operated in exactly the same manner as the Darkness Burglar, killed him and wanted the blame planted on the Darkness Burglar."

The nephew nodded slowly and a tongue around his lips. "I

know what you mean, Sergeant. You want me to tell you if my uncle had any enemies. Yes, he did. One, above all. A lawyer named Ellis. Samuel Ellis."

"Ellis," Foley grunted. "Why?"

"Well, it was rather common knowledge that Ellis used to be my uncle's attorney. Then, some months ago, Ellis brought suit against a business rival of Uncle Paul. It seems that Ellis actually sold out to the other side. Uncle Paul found out and tried to have Ellis disbarred."

"Um," Foley mused. "I see. Have you a telephone I can use?"

FOLEY called Roger Wharton's apartment and received no answer. He hung up slowly, tried Headquarters and learned that Roger hadn't been around for some time. His office reported not hearing from him since he filed the story on Foley's shooting of the gunman.

Foley didn't hang up slowly this time. He dropped the phone and rushed out of the house. A radio car was parked in front and he commandeered it. Within fifteen minutes he was at Roger Wharton's door, pressing the buzzer and getting no response.

Foley didn't hesitate. First, he tried to smash down the door. It was too stout. He drew his gun, placed the muzzle against the lock and fired. The door swung open when he applied pressure again. He walked into the living room and blinked.

Someone had systematically wrecked the place with venom and deliberate intent. A table was smashed in half, chairs were broken. Every mirror and picture was wrecked. Upholstery was slashed. A portable typewriter lay in a hundred pieces on the floor and a bottle of ink had been hurled against one wall.

"Roger!" Foley called.

There was no answer. Foley cocked his head slightly. He was sure that he could hear running water. He took a firmer grip on his gun, passed through a bedroom similarly destroyed and reached the bathroom door. It was closed and locked from the outside. The key was still in the

door. He turned it, opened the door wide and then rushed for the bathtub.

Roger, his arms and legs tied, a gag in his mouth, lay beneath the surface of the water that almost filled the tub. There were bubbles coming to the top. Foley reached into the tub and brought Roger's head and shoulders out of the water. The reporter was unconscious. One side of his face was swollen.

Foley carried him to the bedroom and placed him on the bed. He was reaching for the telephone to summon a doctor when Roger's eyelids fluttered. For a moment, after the eyes opened, they were crammed with terror. This subsided as soon as Roger recognized the detective.

In a few seconds he was able to talk, helped by a neat drink of straight whiskey which Foley poured for him.

"Well," Roger said, "he finally came. The Darkness Burglar. I arrived home after filing the story about you. I felt a bit low over the whole thing. I stepped into the apartment and snapped the light switch; it didn't work. Then a flashlight was turned on me. The Darkness Burglar was standing there, cursing me like a maniac."

"Was the apartment wrecked then, Roger?"

"Smashed. It made me so sore I rushed the burglar's gun. He clipped me on the jaw with it and I went down. Then he beat me up. That man is going to kill someone yet, Sarge. He meant to murder me, of course. He said I was responsible for every cop in town hunting him. Those articles I wrote."

Foley nodded. "They certainly lambasted him. I thought this might happen eventually."

Roger went on, "I was half-conscious when I realized he was tying me up. When I tried to yell for help, I discovered I'd been gagged. Then he dragged me into the bathroom and dumped me into the tub. He turned on the water and hoped I'd die slowly. I tried to get out of that tub, but with hands and feet tied, I couldn't do it. Just before he left, he clipped me again with the

flat of his gun. I couldn't sit erect. I started to slip. I could feel the water climbing toward my mouth as I sank deeper and deeper into it. And I never once had a good look at him."

FOLEY lit a cigar. "You said the Darkness Burglar would kill someone, some day; he did. You're a pretty good prophet. He murdered Paul Gates tonight. Right after he left your place, I imagine. What did he take from you?"

Roger shrugged. "That guy never was too fussy. Anything worth more than a couple of dollars and which he could carry easily, was loot to him. I don't know exactly what is missing. Plenty, I imagine."

Foley extracted the ring from his pocket. "This yours, Rog?"

Roger raised his left hand. The ring finger was barren.

"Good gosh, he even swiped that. Where'd you find it, Sarge?"

"At Paul Gates' house. Lying underneath his body. Looks as if the Darkness Burglar dropped it there. Incidentally, did you check on Attorney Ellis and Horace Russell?"

Roger nodded. "By telephone. A servant in each man's home said they were out and had been away all evening. They didn't know where."

"Ellis was a bitter enemy of Paul Gates. And Gates was viciously murdered, as if by a man who was venting his hatred upon him. Do you feel okay now? I've work to do."

Roger got off the bed. "I'm fine. Thanks, Sarge. You saved my neck that time. I guess I'd better get on the job too."

Foley laughed. "This ought to be an easy story, seeing you were one of the principals. We'll get together later."

Foley hurried down to the apartment house lobby via the lone elevator that worked all night. He asked the operator what time Roger had entered and was told it had been two hours before. No—the operator hadn't taken up any strangers although anyone could have used the stairway easily, passing across the lobby when the lift was on some other floor.

At any rate, Foley thought, Roger was telling the truth. The ring of his, discovered beneath the corpse of a murdered man had been highly suspicious. Yet Foley knew Roger couldn't have tied himself up and he really was in danger of dying in that tub.

Across the street from the apartment, Foley sat on a bench bordering a public park, began thinking hard. The main angle, so far uninvestigated, was his own dilemma. Why had the Darkness Burglar framed him? What did he know that this murderer was afraid of? So scared he took the risk of snatching the gun from the hand of the dead gunman, just to frame a detective.

Foley went over the case from the first time he'd been assigned to it. Not once had he stumbled upon the barest clue. Of course, he had had a glimpse of the man's features when he squirmed through the hedge, but hardly enough to identify him. And then, the frame-up had been carefully planned long before that. So whatever mysterious knowledge he possessed had been acquired some time ago.

Foley hailed a cab and had himself driven to Attorney Ellis' home. It was in the penthouse of a big apartment building. Ellis, attired in bathrobe and pajamas, received him in a library. Ellis was short, inclined to be dapper and had narrow, appraising eyes.

"It's about the murder of Gates, isn't it?" Ellis took the offensive at once. "I didn't kill him, though I'm glad enough that he's dead. I don't know what time he was murdered, but from eight-thirty on, I occupied a seat at the Manville Theatre and I can prove it."

"All right," Foley said. "Go ahead and prove it."

Ellis blinked slightly and turned pink. He seemed to have some effort controlling that red-hot temper he was noted for. But he produced the theatre ticket stub and the names of people who saw him there—especially of a man who sat next to him. Foley checked these by telephone.

"You're in the clear, so far," Foley

said. "Thanks and good night."

HE WENT to see Horace Russell next. Russell was also a small man, no more than five feet four, but possessed of a blistering tongue that was only checked when Foley demanded an alibi.

Russell didn't have any; he was candid about that. "I called on one of my friends—an ex-convict whom I have persuaded to go straight. I left him at nine and walked for two or three hours. I like to walk. I met no one I knew."

Foley said, "All right. At least you're honest about things. Just don't try to leave town."

Russell took that quietly. It was obvious that the man was really scared.

Foley didn't go to Headquarters. He was afraid of meeting some superior who might suspend him on the spot. Instead, he telephoned a close friend of the McNallys.

"I'm in charge of the burglary at the McNally home," Foley explained. "I want to contact Mr. McNally at once. Can you tell me where he is?"

"Why, yes. You can reach him at the Hotel Monterey, in Mexico City. He's due to leave by plane in the morning."

Foley thanked the man and put through the call to Mexico City. He got McNally, talked to him for several minutes, then hung up grimly. His next stop was back at Roger Wharton's apartment, but the reporter wasn't there. Foley went to the newspaper office and found him.

"You look pretty good for what you went through, Rog. I've talked to Ellis and Russell. No soap. I'm quite sure they have nothing to do with this. You see, the man who reached through the hedge to grab that gun, had a long reach. He was a big fellow. Descriptions we have of the Darkness Burglar also indicate he is tall and heavy. Ellis and Russell are small men. You got any new ideas?"

Roger shook his head. "I'm as stumped as you, Sarge. We've something in common though. The Darkness Burglar has tried to get rid of us both."

Foley nodded. "The worst of it is, now that he has resorted to murder, I think he'll clear out of town. It looked to me as if the job on Gates was done to get a big stake. More than fifty thousand in cash and gems were taken there, you know."

Roger asked, "Where would he go? You're having roads, busses, trains and planes watched."

"True," Foley agreed, "but you forget one thing. Nobody has ever seen the Darkness Burglar well enough to describe him. We've only one thing to go on. Gates scratched him badly. Were looking for a man with scratches on his face and hands."

"Then what are you worrying about?" Roger queried. "That's enough to go on."

"There is an alarm out. A five state alarm. Even cars are being stopped on every highway leading out of the city."

"Yes, I know, Rog. And if he stays in town, he'll be found eventually. He won't stay in town though, because he's smart enough to realize that. There are two or three ways he might slip out of town. We can't possibly plug every hole."

"No, I suppose not," Roger agreed slowly. "Though I can't see those loopholes myself."

FOLEY shrugged. "I can think of three right now. By boat! He could charter or steal some sort of a craft. Harbor patrols can't see or hear every boat that slips across the bay. Then, by private plane perhaps. There are a number of places where you can rent a plane and a pilot. They wouldn't be apt to ask too many questions if the right kind of money was flashed."

"You're right," Roger groaned. "Every exit can't be covered."

"Well, let's suppose they were. In fact, they will be. I'm going to ask headquarters to pay especial attention to piers, waterfront areas and private flying fields. Still, there is another way. A good one, that has been worked several times. Through Blake Park. It's on the outskirts, but you can reach it by subway. There is a viaduct for pedestrians. It is very dark, unpatrolled and leads

across the city line beyond any police barriers. Say he used this means and got to a highway along which busses pass. He could get on one. They'd already been looked over so he'd be safe."

"Let's go someplace and have a few drinks," Roger suggested. "You're making me feel absolutely morose about the whole thing."

"I'm sorry. Wish I could, but I've got to prod the department into action. I'll look you up in the morning, Rog. Be careful. That guy may come back."

Roger shuddered. "I've already reserved a hotel room and I'm going to spend the next few days there. I don't want to meet him again."

THERE was a misty haze just before daybreak and the chill ate through Sergeant Foley's clothing. He stood, concealed by a niche in the single viaduct leading through Blake Park. Since he had arrived, an hour and a half before, not a soul had passed by. He was growing more apprehensive by the minute.

Then he heard the first soft footfalls. Foley slid his gun in and out of its holster several times. He risked a quick look out of his refuge. Two shadowy figures were moving in his direction very fast. He waited until they were fifty feet away.

Foley stepped out, blocking the passage. He stood there, casually and carelessly—it seemed. In reality, Foley had never been more alert.

"Hello, Roger," he said. "It took you and your brother long enough to get here."

Roger Wharton dropped back a pace. The man with him gave a wild yell and drew a gun. He had it almost level when Foley's service pistol banged once. The man twisted around violently, clawed at his throat with one hand and then dropped.

"Sarge," Roger called out. "Don't shoot. I'm not armed and even if I were, I know I'd have no chance against you. Let me go to him. He's my brother, just as you said."

"Stay where you are," Foley ordered crisply, "and lift those arms of yours. There is nothing you can

do for him. I know where my bullet went."

"You usually do," Roger groaned. "Sarge, it was all such a silly affair as far as I'm concerned. I wrote those articles and meant them. They drew the Darkness Burglar to me and—he was my brother. I hadn't seen him in years though I knew he was a thief. I had to help him."

"Blood runs deep, eh?" Foley growled. "Sure it does. Crook's blood and it flows through your veins too. Turn around and put your hands behind your back."

Roger obeyed. Foley clamped handcuffs into place, searched the reporter and then examined the man he'd shot. The Darkness Burglar was dead, his pockets loaded with loot he'd never enjoy.

"Sarge, I'll co-operate all I can," Roger implored. "Give me a break. My brother—his name was Bob—tried to frame you. I knew about it, but I couldn't stop him. The moment you were assigned to the case, I knew you'd get him eventually. You're too smart. For instance, your little scheme of telling me the only sure way to get him out of town. You blocked every other route and left this one open."

FOLEY said, "The only way to land him was to make you bring him to me. He looks like you somewhat. I thought so when I saw his head stick out of that hedge. But until I realized why I was framed, I couldn't be certain."

"You know that too?" Roger sighed.

"I know you did your best to make me suspect Ellis and Russell—even to having your brother kill Gates, whom Ellis hated. That didn't work. You met your brother right after he'd killed Gates. He told you he'd lost his ring, a duplicate of the one you wore. So you had him wreck your apartment and fake a murderous attack upon you so I'd think he looted your apartment first, got your ring and lost it at Gates' place. It almost worked."

"I told him we wouldn't fool you," Roger said softly. "I warned him to pull no more jobs and get away be-

fore you realized why he'd framed you. But he had to pull one more job. I couldn't control him, Sarge; I swear it."

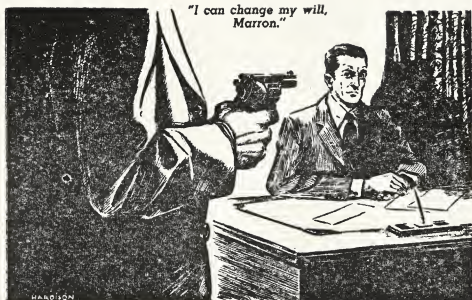
Foley said, "You could have told me the truth and let me go after him. It was that shrunken head that did it, of course. Part of his loot from the McNally place. He must have thought it was worth something. He brought it to your apartment; I showed up and you forgot to hide the thing. The moment you knew I saw that, you were aware that your brother was finished. And you told him so which resulted in his attempt to frame me. Get me off the case. So that when McNally returned and listed the things stolen from his house, I'd not be apt to discover that at shrunken human head was among the items."

"Yes," Roger said disconsolately.

"When I noticed McNally's collection of South American relics and weapons, I began to suspect," Foley said. "So I telephoned McNally and asked him if he had owned a shrunken head. When he said yes, I knew the truth—so I got you to bring your brother out of hiding. You're both fools. If he'd stayed hidden, we'd never have landed him. Even a police force the size of ours couldn't possibly search every room, apartment and tenement in this city. Too bad, Rog. I always thought you were a right guy, even if you did give me the devil in your newspaper articles. Start walking. There's a police call box half a mile back of you."

(THE END)

★ ★ ★ ★



Slight Detail

By DAVID MORRISON

Marron's vengeance-murder was perfect, except for . . .

AS THE clock in the library chimed ten, Hobbs rang for his butler; he needed a drink. For three hours he'd been working on a plan by which the dissolution of the partnership between himself and his brother could be accomplished with fairness to both. The cause of their quarrel had been such a silly thing. Perhaps the new letterhead his brother had printed was an improvement over the one they'd been using for so many years. Anyway, the design of a letterhead wasn't that important; he shouldn't have been so bull-headed.

He rang for the butler a second time, then remembered that he was alone in the house. This was Thursday, the servant's night off.

But the opening of the library door told Hobbs that he was not alone. His face paled slightly.

There was a man standing in the doorway. He held a revolver.

The intruder stepped inside. "Remember me, Hobbs?"

"Of course, Marron," Hobbs replied quietly. "I shouldn't easily forget a former employe who so completely disabused my trust. But, what's done is done. Have a cigar?" His hand reached for the desk drawer.

"Keep both hands on the desk!" Marron snapped. He thrust the revolver forward for emphasis. "No tricks with me, Hobbs. You must think I'm dumb."

Hobbs smiled disarmingly. "You always used to be, Marron. If you remember, the first time I caught you stealing, I let you off with a warning and advised you to go straight because you were too stupid to be a successful crook."

"I didn't come here for any post mortems, Hobbs."

"But you see I was right. By the way, wasn't it five years you got for robbing us three years ago? How is it you're out so soon?"

"'Cause I'm not as dumb as you always thought I was."

"That doesn't tell me much, of course," Hobbs tried to sound casual, but his brain was turning flip-flops in a search for some way to outwit the man with the revolver. He suspected Marron had come to kill him.

"I'm still doing my stretch, Hobbs," said Marron, with a gloating leer, "but I took a leave of absence tonight, to do something I've been planning for three years."

"It must be important."

"I'll say it is. I'm going to kill you and your brother." Marron leaned over the desk and grinned. "You're not as calm as you're pretending, Hobbs. You're scared stiff."

HOBBS' fingers were drumming on the desktop, as his mind groped for an escape from his terrifying situation. There must be some way to outwit this fool. Perhaps if he stalled long enough, help might come. It was a slim hope, for the butler would not return before midnight.

"You realize, Marron, that the punishment for murder is—"

"Yeah, I know all about the electric chair. That's why I spent three years thinking up a way to kill you without getting caught."

"And—you think you've found it?"

"I have found it, Hobbs. I'll make it look like suicide. Besides, they can't pin a murder on a guy who's in jail."

"But you're not in jail—"

"There's no one knows I'm not except you—and you'll never tell anyone. I escaped from the prison farm tonight. They won't miss me until tomorrow morning."

"But they'll miss you then, of course."

Marron laughed grimly. "Oh, no, they won't. 'Cause I'm going to sneak back before morning—the same way I got out. Imagine a guy breaking into jail." He laughed again. "Clever?"

"Sure your plans won't slip up?" Hobbs' fingers were beating a rapid

tattoo on the desk now. "If you go back, it means two more years to serve, you know."

"I can get half that knocked off for good behavior, and I'm willing to serve the other year to square myself with you and your brother."

"Unfortunately for you—but fortunately for my brother Robert—you won't be able to get him. He's now living abroad. He and I quarreled and I bought his share of the business. You'll be doing him a good turn, Marron; he'll inherit my fortune. I intended to change my will when we quarreled, but—well, you know how it is. We all put things off until it's too late."

"Knowing it's going to make your brother richer takes some of the fun out of bumping you off, Hobbs. But it can't be helped."

"But it can, Marron. I could write a new will, leaving my estate to my niece in Cleveland."

Hobbs tried not to look too eager, as the man with the revolver eyed him suspiciously.

"That isn't much of a favor to ask, is it?" Hobbs added, partly to relieve the nerve-snapping tension and partly to disarm the other man.

"Make it snappy," Marron ordered. "But keep both hands above the desk."

Hobbs tore a sheet from the calendar pad at his elbow and wrote hurriedly. He dated it, then shoved the paper toward Marron.

"My niece will no doubt be delighted—after a proper mourning period, of course. Would you mind witnessing my signature—to make it strictly legal?"

Marron sneered. He did not touch the paper. "You still think I'm dumb, don't you? I sign that so the police will know I was here tonight—"

"But I can date it back—say four years—"

"Yeah—even though it's written on a calendar sheet with today's date. If you didn't think of that, Hobbs, then you're not so smart yourself."

The fingers resumed their tattoo. "All right, Marron. Tear it up. Do you mind if I get a sheet of paper from my desk drawer?"

MARRON watched warily as Hobbs took one of his firm's letterheads from the drawer. Quickly Hobbs wrote his will, then shoved it toward the other man.

"You'll notice I've dated it five years back—two years before you went to prison. If you'll just witness it—"

Marron stared suspiciously at his victim. Apparently he was afraid of being tricked.

Hobbs sought to reassure him. "It's a pity my brother will never know how you deprived him of my fortune."

The mention of the brother he hated seemed to make up Marron's mind. He kept his revolver aimed at Hobbs as he scrawled his signature on the paper.

"If any of my relatives should find this here after I've—gone, it might be destroyed," Hobbs said. "In that event, of course, my previous will in favor of my brother would be effective. May I put this paper in the safe? Or, if you don't trust me, put it in yourself."

Marron hesitated for a moment, as he seemed to weigh the possibilities of a trick. Then, forcing Hobbs to stand in the corner with upraised hands, he quickly placed the will in the Personal compartment.

"Notice the kid gloves I'm wearing, Hobbs?" he remarked, rather proudly. "No fingerprints. Still think I'm dumb?"

"You have improved, Marron. Now close the door and twist the knob, if you don't mind." Hobbs prayed fervently that, if Marron noticed the tremor in his voice, he would assume

it to be the nervousness of a man about to die.

The safe door clanged shut. The knob spun around.

Marron eyed his victim gloatingly. "Want to say your prayers first?"

Hobbs' tense expression vanished. He smiled confidently. "You can't kill me now, Marron—not without dying in the electric chair. Your signed confession is locked in the safe for the police."

Marron's expression was one of mixed disbelief and fear. "That was your will I signed. I read it—" He suddenly leered contemptuously. "You can't bluff me, Hobbs. Nobody will know I was here tonight."

"The paper you signed is in the safe, Marron, which I naturally won't open for you; so I'll tell you where you made your mistake. I said my brother and I had quarreled—which is true—and that he's now living abroad—which is not true. I told you you're not clever enough to be a successful criminal. That, fortunately for me, is true. For one thing, even though my will is dated five years back, the fresh appearance of the ink would indicate it had been written recently. But more important, you failed to notice that the letterhead I used is somewhat different in design from the one we used when you worked for us. My brother had it changed *only a month ago*, despite my objections. That was what we quarreled about."

* * *

(THE END)

CAUSE INDEED FOR WORRY

"My, you have an awfully sad look on your face!" the traveling man vouchsafed to his train-riding companion. "If there is anything wrong, please let me know if I can be of assistance."

"Thank you," replied the object of his query, a man with a face hardened by a great many lines. "There's nothing exactly wrong. It's just that I've finished a twenty-year prison

stretch and I'm on my way home. I'm wondering how my old friends will greet me.

"By the way you don't look exactly happy yourself. What are you so sad about?"

"I," was the pungent answer "have just finished my term in Congress. I too, am on my way home to meet my old friends!"

Wilcey Earle

KING OF KILLERS

By EMIL PETAJA

*Hamlet the Great had only his stage-tricks to set against a killer's
bullet presdigation!*



HAMLET, magician and mental wizard *par excellence*, bowed graciously. Out front the select Hollywood audience went wild.

For nine weeks he had packed them in, here at this little theatre off Sunset Boulevard. Women adored his tall, handsome build and suave manners. His crisp dark hair had just a hint of silver at the temples, and that curved smile had an ironic lilt. Men enjoyed his swift, witty patter, woven through as it was with racy ribaldry.

With the aid of a slide projector, Hamlet had just finished demonstrating his uncanny ability to memorize a full page of print—they were furnished by the audience—by the merest casual glance.

With a sweep of his crimson-silk lined cape, he now stode magnificently off into the wings. But they called him back again and again. Finally he held up his hand for silence, and his magnetic personality demanded instant obedience. The awed noise subsided.

"Ladies and gentlemen," his faintly-accented voice told them, "now I am going to give you my *piece de resistance*. I call it, 'The Bird In The Gilded Cage', and it features my angelic new assistant, Miss Carol Bryce. And now—the most beautiful girl in the world!"

He waved his hand and a girl appeared. She was slim, shimmeringly blonde, and scantily clad in the bright red and yellow plumage of a tropical bird. Hardened as this audience was to superlatives, a chorus of sighs and wolf-calls greeted her arrival.

Carol Bryce was small, even fragile, but her ethereal quality was surface stuff. Born virtually in a suitcase to a five-a-day vodvil team, she had learned early how unsavory life can be. There had been ugly moments in her life, but she learned not to let it show. So the audience saw only a shy, engaging smile on her lips. They couldn't see that deep in her coral-blue eyes lurked a naked, all-possessing fear....

She had been hired for the coming South American tour only. In fact,

she had shrunk from appearing in Hollywood. It was most unusual, since most girls would pray for such a chance, hoping a studio might spot them and make them into stars. Hamlet didn't pry. He felt that in due time she would learn that here was one man she could trust.

Then, when Irene Tilson eloped to Yuma without an hour's warning, Hamlet was desperate. Carol knew the routine, so she insisted on stepping in. After all, it was only for three nights. And this was the last Hollywood performance...

WHEN HIS hand touched hers as they bowed, he was startled to discover that it was ice cold, trembling.

"Sure you're well enough to go on?" he murmured, under cover of the applause.

She nodded, smiling crookedly. Hamlet had been more than kind to her, and right now going to South America was what she wanted more than anything in the world. She couldn't let him down.

Hamlet kept up a gay patter while his second assistant, carrot-topped Tippy, who wore a loud purple uniform, wheeled out an ebony box with red dragons on it, and then uncovered a big gilt-wired cage attached to heavy ropes that arced upward across the entire theatre and were securely fastened at the center of the second balcony.

"All set, Tippy?" Hamlet inquired in a snappy aside.

"Righto, boss!" Tippy grinned cheerfully, and then cast Carol an anxious look as he began to heave on the rope end, and the re-draped cage swung on its pulleys up to the edge of the second balcony.

The customers craned their necks, wondering what it was all about. Tippy vanished into the wings and Hamlet opened the doors of the big ebony box. He displayed it deftly. Perfectly empty. No false bottoms. No trickery... Carol stepped in it, and he closed the doors.

Raking in laughs, Hamlet waved his wand at the draped cage, across half the theater. Then he touched a

lever and the cage came swooping back.

The magician opened the ebony box. It was empty. With a final quip and a debonair gesture he whisked the velvet off the wire cage.

Carol was there, yes. But she wasn't prettily posed like a bird. She was crumpled in a heap at the bottom. A knife handle protruded from her yellow back feathers, which were fast changing color.

Ignoring the tumult the customers made, Hamlet flung open the door and knelt beside her.

"Carol—"

The girl's eyelids fluttered as she struggled valiantly to speak. She managed only a choked sigh. In her hand was clutched a playing card.

Behind him, Hamlet heard Tippy's pathetic wail. "Boss, is she—"

"Yes, Tippy. She's dead."

IN THE CHAOTIC confusion that followed this unscheduled variation on Hamlet's *piece de resistance* the magician maintained an icy, brittle calm. He shouted orders.

The curtain was drawn; police notified; the hysterical audience was dismissed.

"W-Who could of done it, boss?" Tippy asked mournfully. He had adored Carol reverently from afar.

"She was terrified of something—of somebody, poor kid," Hamlet muttered stonily. "I shouldn't have let her go on. I should have skipped this."

"No, boss! Don't blame yourself. She insisted, remember. Besides, who'd of dreamt that—"

Hamlet sighed.

"As you say, Tippy. Who would have dreamed..." His voice changed. "You didn't notice anybody around back-stage? Anybody who didn't belong?"

"No, boss!" Tippy cried bewilderedly. "Nobody! It's impossible!"

"So my illusions appear, Tippy, but to you and me, knowing the mechanism behind the scenes—they are simplicity itself."

Tippy nodded doubtfully.

"Wait here," Hamlet told him.

"Don't let anyone touch anything until the police arrive."

He passed into the dusky wings and down a narrow metal stairway to the basement. This was Hamlet's prop room, and in the center ceiling were mounted the metal elevators to two trap-doors. The doors were round, the mechanism worked like a charm.

Hamlet wasn't surprised to find several drops of fresh blood on the platform just between the twin elevators.

"She was struck down just as she moved from Elevator 1 to Elevator 2. Whoever did it knew the set-up; he was nobody's fool. It was carefully prearranged."

His search for clues garnered nothing. He sighed, and ascended Elevator 1 to make a bewildering appearance before Lieutenant Carson Reeves of Homicide.

REEVES WAS about fifty, but gave the effect of being ten years younger. He had a wide, homely face set with grave, almost sad, brown eyes. His movements were slow and deliberate, and he had once boasted that his lack of imagination was what made him the most valuable man on the force.

His big hand removed the playing card deftly from the dead girl's grip. He stared at it and grunted.

"What kind of a card do you call this?"

"A trick card," Hamlet told him. "It's divided diagonally—half of it representing the King of Diamonds, the other half the King of Clubs. I use them in simple sleight-of-hand."

"Where'd she get it?"

"There's a small black-velvetted shelf between the trap doors underneath us. She must have seized it off there after she was struck."

"Why?"

"To give us a clue to her killer."

Reeves stroked his jowl and frowned. "What kind of a clue is this? It could mean either—"

"I'm sure," Hamlet said, flipping a cigarette to his lips and lighting it, "that Carol would have loved to furnish you with the name and address

of her assailant. As it was, she did her best in the brief seconds left to her. Carol was a plucky girl, and I shan't move a step out of Hollywood until I've sent her murderer to the gas chamber."

IT WAS THREE evenings later, and, wearing his voluminous stage-cloak, Hamlet strode Hollywood Boulevard, careless of the drizzling midnight rain. He was disgusted with himself. Somewhere amid the glitter and tinsel of flirtatious Hollywood lurked a cool-handed killer, and he, Hamlet the Great, was unable to find him. This despite the straight-forward clew Carol had left to his identity.

Surprising how many different interpretations could be made of Carol's clew. Hamlet had made a list, and was checking them one by one. The fact that the clew was double-edged didn't help any.

He scowled down at the last name on his list. "*King of Klubs*. 1519 Melmont Ave. Just off the boulevard."

He turned the corner onto Melmont Avenue, and came face to face with his last hopeful.

"Just another night-spot," he murmured, surveying the gay neon sign. "Well. Worth a try, anyway."

His gloved fingers tapped his topper to a rakish angle, gave the revolver under his tails-coat an affectionate pat, and swaggered in. As he surrendered his topper and cape to the check girl, his uncanny grey-green eyes moved across the large circular room three steps below. Not much different than hundreds of others. Tables circling an opalescent dance floor. Murky bluish lights. Walls muralled with playing card characters, with the King of Clubs predominating.

He shouldered to the bar, and lounged languorously over a bourbon and soda. He appeared bored to the girls as he glanced about him, but his eyes missed nothing.

An hour went by. Five minutes of close-up time. Nothing...

Winking lights informed the night-owls it was time to shove off. The floor cleared rapidly, and soon the

bar was almost deserted. The bar-keep eyed Hamlet significantly.

Finally Hamlet uttered a profound yawn and moved lazily to the check window. He was acquiring his hat and cloak when two men swept in and brushed by him preemptorily.

"Pardon me," Hamlet murmured ironically as the big one knocked his hat on the floor in passing.

HE PICKED it up, glancing curiously after them. The small stooge-type looked back over his shoulder and tittered. He had a bird-like beak, small ferret eyes, and a thin, fang-toothed smile.

The big-shouldered man looked neither to right nor left. He strode possessively across the deserted floor, rather, Hamlet thought, like a bull in a china-shop which it has recently acquired. He had the build of a fighter, a heavyweight.

As he swept toward the blank, muralled wall the magician glimpsed his face. He had seen that map, with its big, scarred chin, and those protuberent, fish-belly eyes before. Where? Who?

"Who was that just passed?" he asked the check girl innocently.

"Why, that was Mister Kamus! He owns the club!"

So. Julian Kamus. Big-shot gambler and crook. Everybody knew he headed the larger rackets about town, including the police; but his agility in side-stepping indictments was a nine-days-wonder. No one could be found who was brave enough to stand witness against him. The district attorney was disgusted.

Hamlet watched Julian Kamus reach the wall, press something, saw part of the wall slide open, and the racket-king and his little stooge disappear in. The door closed abruptly behind them. And that door was pictured in the mural as a jaunty black King of Clubs.

HE NOTICED the girl watching him oddly, so he gave her a wide smile and a bow after tying on his cloak. She giggled, and in that instant Hamlet apparently vanished. She would swear to her dying day

that she saw him step out onto the street. He had such gorgeous—such penetrating—eyes.

She was still giggling as she left the club, in company with the cigarette girl. The musicians, waiters, and other hired help filed out, and soon the King of Klubs was silent. Silent and dark.

The wine-hued velvet opposite the check room moved, and then a tall, cloaked shadow moved soundlessly across the floor toward the invisible door behind which Kamus and stooge had vanished.

Hamlet's tapered, sensitive fingers probed for the wall's hidden stud, found it, and the door slid open. He eased through and closed it behind him. He was in a small, smartly furnished but dim-lit foyer. There were four doors.

Hamlet listened carefully at one and, satisfied it was unoccupied, stepped in and locked it behind him. A diffusion of florescent light issued from a lamp on a blonde desk by a large opaque window. It shone on varnished file cases and on big leather chairs.

This, then, must be Julian Kamus' private office. The jackpot!

A cool smile played about Hamlet's lips as he cased the desk thoroughly. One drawer defied him. He tried the ingenious escape-artist's tool on his watch chain, and it submitted. He opened the business-like envelopes it contained, and thumbed through papers which he realized with a sudden chilling at the nape of his neck must be Julian Kamus' most private records. Records which could sent the racket-king to Alcatraz for the next six-hundred years!

Kamus' activities were as unpleasant as they were numerous. A most prolific and ungodly person, Hamlet mused.

Crooked gambling; diverse larcenies; blackmail; and—not least—murder.

One particular item held his attention now. A news clipping dated three years back, regarding the racket-king's last trail. Like the others, it turned out a fiasco, but for

a while it looked as if the district attorney had him where he wanted him. The state had a surprise witness, a girl named Karen Bruce. This girl had been in Kamus' employ; she had inadvertently discovered secrets. The district attorney persuaded her to talk, but, the night before she was to appear in court, she vanished.

"Karen Bruce..." Hamlet murmured thoughtfully.

HIS EARS detected the soft breathing sound behind him. He whirled, in the same movement snatching out his revolver.

Its mushroomed flame matched the spuming smoke-death from the dusk behind. Both bullets missed. Before the sneaker could shoot again Hamlet had catapulted across the room, his cloak like bat-wings behind him, and was on him.

Lead fanned his cheek, and then his left hand vised like steel over a scrawny wrist. The gun went sliding to the floor while Hamlet's right smashed out against a big, familiar nose. He felt it crunch under the weight of his blow.

The stooge went down, whining like a sick dog.

Breathing hard, the magician leaped to obtain the sheaf of papers he'd purloined from the desk, but a doorway edged snarl from the foyer doorway stopped him dead in his tracks.

"Put your hands behind your head and stand put, sucker!"

Even before the room blared with light, Hamlet knew this was Kamus, the big boss himself. He had somehow contrived to unlock the office door from outside, and there he was, limned against the comparative dusk, big as life and twice as ugly. A tight smile gashed his face, and in gloating his eyes seemed more popped-out and fishy than ever.

His automatic was level with Hamlet's breastbone.

THE ELECTRIC tautness that pervaded the air of Kamus' central lair was relaxed a bit after the gang-king took Hamlet's gun, pawed him for other weapons, and then

pushed him unceremoniously into one of those big leather chairs.

If Hamlet's spine had become suddenly coated thinly with ice, he saw no reason for visually displaying that fact before this baboon and his ferret-eyed stooge. He helped himself to a cigarette from the box on the desk and lit it, inhaling luxuriously while he eyed Kamus with gentle reproach.

Kamus was busy taping up the little guy's nose, and the stooge was busy delving into the question of Hamlet's parentage, as well as making obscene suggestions regarding his personal habits. Curses spewed from between his yellow-rimmed fangs in a monotonous stream.

"That'll do, Pike!" Kamus snapped, then. "I got to figure how to get rid of this monkey."

"Lemme do it, boss!"

Kamus grunted. "First we got to get rid of those papers. I should of done it before. Anyway, he only got a fast look at them, not enough to learn much. Good thing that alarm woke me up when he touched it off!"

Hamlet smiled dreamily while Pike crammed the incriminating papers in a metal waste basket and touched a match to it.

"Now," Kamus said, standing before him and stroking his automatic ominously.

"I wouldn't advise it, Kamus," Hamlet yawned.

"No?"

"No. You see, I left information with my assistant Tippy as to exactly where I was going, and what I expected to find. Tippy's a smart boy. What's more, he is in constant touch with Lieutenant Reeves of Homicide, who is working on the Carol Bryce case. If I am not back at the hotel in—" He consulted his watch, "—precisely fifteen minutes they'll be here, and not alone."

He smiled regretfully. Kamus scowled down at him, fondling his automatic.

HAMLET was sitting on a keg of dynamite, and it was as if he'd calmly bent down to light his cigarette off the sputtering fuse. Kamus

would just as soon rub him out as look at him.

"That red-haired stooge of yours, eh?" he muttered, scratching his chin with the gun-barrel.

Hamlet nodded blithely.

"Furthermore, I know you killed Carol Bryce, nee Karen Bruce. I found out quite a few things. She used to work for you. The D.A. pinned her down and convinced her to spill what she knew. But the night before she appeared in court, you threatened her. She got scared, and left town.

"You kept hunting for her. She knew too much; she was dangerous. When you found out she was in town, working in my shew, you decided to get rid of her. You managed it very cleverly, finding out about the trap doors and all. I must congratulate you. But unfortunately I was there. My anger was roused. And that is where you made your *faux pas*, Julian."

"Yeah?" Kamus grinned his scorn, but his eyes betrayed momentary perturbation.

Maybe Hamlet's stooge was in the know. Kamus could not afford to take chances...

"Why didn't you tip off the cops if you knew so much?"

"I wasn't sure. I'm a tidy creature. I wanted to tie the case up into a neat bouquet before I handed it to Lieutenant Reeves."

Kamus labored this information over in his mind. So the cops didn't know; only Tippy. He drew Pike aside and whispered something in his ear. Pike grinned ghoulishly, and left the room. Kamus came back to Hamlet, fingering his roscoe and grinning.

"Know where Pike went?"

"I have my hopes."

"Well, smart guy, he's gone to take care of Tippy—while I take care of you!"

HAMLET'S muscles tightened involuntarily. Then he reached over to the desk and trimmed his cigarette in the tray. His attitude was outwardly unchanged, but his brain was on fire.

Was his bluff succeeding, or would it only lead to Tippy's death, too? Poor Tippy wasn't over-bright. He had no idea where his boss was; nobody did. If Hamlet got himself nicked slinking around Kamus' private preserves, that, in a manner of speaking, was his own funeral.

But dumb, faithful Tippy. No. That must not happen.

What to do? He glanced idly around the room. Tackle Kamus bare-handed? It wasn't a wise move. It would only precipitate his own departure from this vale of tears. The window? No, those shadowy slashes across its outside were bars. And Kamus' private office would naturally be sound-proof. The telephone? If only he could use it in some way. Warn Tippy...

He crushed out his fag, tensing for a sudden spring on the racketeer. But he had delayed too long even for that. The door leaped open, and three men slouched in.

Besides Pike there was a smash-faced bruiser with a moronic grin and a business-like heater, and a small, sharp-eyed fellow who wore a hackie's cap.

"Know what to do, Lefty?" Kamus demanded.

Lefty nodded. "Valley road. I'm to pick up a guy named Tippy at the service station at Ferris Junction. He's got red-hair and freckles. Drives a blue limousine. I'm to pretend to be from his boss. Give him the works!"

"Okay. Get going."

Hamlet was seemingly asleep, but he caught every word. He heard the door slam behind Lefty, and watched Kamus go to the telephone, through veiled eyes.

"Hey, you!" Kamus blared. "What's his number?"

Hamlet blinked.

"The hotel you mean? Prospect 6631."

"Check it," Kamus told Pike.

Pike looked it up. "Okay, boss."

Kamus dialed then turned to Hamlet again.

"What name?"

"Tippy has room B-5. Ask for Mr. Johnson. But wouldn't it be better if I talked to him?"

Kamus sneered. "Give me Mr. Johnson in Room B-5," he directed the hotel clerk at the other end of the line. He waited, then put his hand over the mouthpiece. "Him, all right. I'd know that stupid voice anyplace."

Hamlet shrugged. "Of course it's Tippy. You people are so suspicious!"

"Listen," Kamus told Tippy. "I'm calling from a house out in Glendale. Your boss, Mr. Hamlet, has been in a car accident. Yeah. Hurt bad. He's askin' for you, and he can't last long, so you better hurry right out." He followed up with crisp directions. "Service station at the junction. A cab-driver will pick you up. Don't worry about your boss. We'll take care of him."

A crafty smile twitched the corners of his mouth as he cradled the receiver. "He'll be there. He got all excited and sputtered like a model T. Fell for it like a ton of bricks!"

Hamlet winced. Yes, it was just the kind of a corny gag Tippy would fall for...

KAMUS WORE down the rug-nap, and chain-smoked while he waited for Lefty to call and tell them the job was finished. Pike and the nameless bruiser hovered in the background.

Hamlet slid down inconspicuously in his chair, his legs sprawled under the desk. He smiled sardonically to himself. Hamlet the Great—the greatest magician in all the world! He unblushingly admitted that to one and all. But here he was in a coffin-corner—a dead end. Was his mental agility enough to outwit Julian Kamus—and put these gorillas where they belonged?

If Tippy were just a shade brighter the odds might not be quite so monumental...

Hours tripped over one another in their march toward dawn. Hamlet's keen ears were the first to detect faint sounds in the little foyer. It was as if the pug Kamus had on guard there were indulging in some kind of violent exercises.

He had been silent for so long that Kamus and his pals almost forgot his existence. They all turned toward the door wonderingly.

Hamlet's wiry muscles coiled as his hands closed tightly over the arms of his chair. In one gigantic leap he was on Kamus.

The automatic barked wildly three times while the magician endeavored to dislodge it. Pike and the bruiser gaped. Pike whined in terror when the last wayward bullet raked his ear.

Hamlet tightened his grip and the automatic hit the floor.

Kamus, professional maunder, possessed the instinctive technique of a born killer within his two hundred pounds of hard beef. Hamlet was slender as a wand, but supple. He seemed mounted on springs, was here, there, everywhere. His grey-green eyes shone like back-lighted flint.

Pike wanted to shoot, but dared not. He might hit his boss. Finally, when he had a clear target, he let fly.

HAMLET FELT the hot tongue of the bullet across his neck, and for an instant he was distracted from his battle. In that instant Kamus' thunder-slug contacted.

The magician thought Niagara Falls had suddenly been diverted through his cranium, and it was lighted up like a Fourth of July celebration.

His knees melted. The floor threatened to fly up and hit him on the chin. He reeled, dimly conscious of someone battering on a door with heavy weights. He heard Kamus' grunt of triumph as he grabbed Hamlet's neat shirt-front.

Hamlet shook his head violently. Some of the nausea left him, and there in front of him was the killer's ugly face, with murder written all over it.

He sprang back to avoid the kill-blow Kamus launched. His foot struck something, Kamus' fallen gun. Kamus lunged for his throat. He ducked, scooped up the heater and jabbed it painfully in the killer's stomach.

While all this was occurring the heavy door smashed inward and cops poured in. Hamlet side-glanced to see Lieutenant Reeves covering the killing's disconsolate stooges, while Tippy's flaming head goggled up over his shoulder.

"I see you got him," Reeves remarked. Then he found the waste basket with all the evidence against Kamus in mutilated ashes.

"He'll get away with it again!" he groaned.

"No, he won't," Hamlet grinned. "I've got all the evidence you need to send them all to the chair."

"Where?" Reeves demanded.

Hamlet tapped his forehead. "Here."

IT WAS WHILE Hamlet's blue limousine carried them swiftly along rambling Sunset toward the downtown station, Tippy driving, that Lieutenant Reeves demanded a full explanation. Hamlet was happy to oblige.

"But there's one thing you forgot to tell me," Reeves complained. "Just exactly *how* did you tipoff your stooge that Kamus was holding you at his night-club? From what Tippy told me, Kamus himself talked to him and—"

Hamlet shook his forefinger coyly.

"Ah! But that comes under the category of a professional secret. As you know, a magician never tells!"

Reeves groaned.

"Some kind of supernatural hocus-pocus I suppose."

"Hardly," Hamlet lit a cigarette, and the officer's, then said, "Cheer up, old man. I guess it won't hurt to reveal this one bit of witchcraft. It's really old stuff, but Thurston had New York agog with it in the good old days."

"Thurston?"

"My illustrious predecessor. It was his famous telephone card trick. It went like this. At an exclusive gathering Thurston had one of the guests draw a card from an untampered deck. The guest displayed the card and Thurston requested him to call up a Mr. Abercrombie in Chicago on the long distance telephone. The guest did, and without a second's hesitation Mr. Abercrombie told him which card he just choose."

Lieutenant Reeves swore mildly.

"How the devil—"

"Painfully simple, Lieutenant. The

(Continued On Page 90)

PORTRAIT OF A PUNK



By TOM THURSDAY

ALL JOEY GANN had to do was go to the side entrance to the Eli Crane Company, jimmy the door, walk one flight upstairs, take the waiting \$2000 payroll, and return to Zane Hammerton. Easy and simple, like finding a snowflake in a blizzard.

Joey Gann was Zane Hammerton's pupil and practical robot. Of course he wasn't very bright. His head, with stick-up red hair, slanted too much in the region of the forehead. The watery brown eyes were shifty and

shaky. The nose was artificially flat and puggish, having been knocked in that shape from too many alley fights.

True, Joey never had much of a chance in life. His childhood recalled a booze-bumping father and a stepmother who believed that gin was the world's chief drink. One day he became tired of the hunger cry from his empty stomach, his first theft was bread and cheese. The juvenile judge was outraged when he heard the case and tossed Joey into an

over-crowded reform school. Therein he learned from master craftsmen that it was just as easy to steal better stuff than bread and cheese.

Paroled, he started picking pockets, served another short term, then graduated to shoplifting. Another visit to the clink. Time: two years. When he was released he met his mentor, Zane Hammerton.

Joey Gann was just what Hammerton was seeking, a perfect flophead and fall guy. In turn, Joey thought Hammerton had a beaut of a brain. Hammerton had what he considered a swell education. He had read a few slices of Shakespeare, plowed through some of the classics, and could wobble the Websterian without many grammatical errors. This knowledge was forced on him via private schools. He was no slum sucker, fighting for food, his parents had money and a honored place in respectable society. It was a cockeyed fate that permitted the junior Hammerton to be born of their blood.

He started stealing from fellow pupils. Mamma told the principal that Zane was a good boy, mothers are like that. Papa kept his mouth shut; the Old Man knew better. Much better. Junior was reinstated in the school. Within a week he had sloughed the principal over the head with a home-made blackjack, rifled his pockets of nearly \$50 cash, and then left home. That was six years ago and he was now twenty-one. During the six years he served time for assault and battery, with intent to rob, a theatre holdup, and one term for stealing nickels from a phone pay station. He was wholly obsessed with the notion that he was a smart smick, with the world to be taken, taken by crookery. He had a strong Hitler complex, believed he was persecuted and misunderstood.

"Understand, now," said Hammerton. "Get there exactly at midnight. You know the lay. Don't use a flash, make it neat, quick and speedy. Understand, Joey?"

"Yeah," said Joey, "I understand. And wen I get the dough I meet you in front of Silk's jernt; hey?"

"Right; in front of Silk's joint.

We lay low for a day and then drive to Miami for the winter."

"Gee, Miami! I kin play duh races, huh?"

"Sure," said Hammerton. "You can play the races. And you can even go swimming in warm water. In January and February. Swell; eh?"

"Yeah, swell. I kin play duh races and go swimmin' in warm water. Boy!"

"All right. You understand. Better go to your room and get some sleep. You got nearly four hours. But remember! No booze, not a drink! You can't take it. After you get the dough, you can have a quart a night."

"Okay; no booze. Notta drink. I go get a couple hamburgers, then go home and get some sleep..."

HAMMERTON went to Silk Hoke's Fun Club, a third class night spot, a rendezvous for slumming tourists looking for thrills, and a meeting place for underworld society. Sleek, pomaded gents, with the souls of leeches, escorted by their moll-dolls. All with the morals of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Hammerton had an even \$50 in his pocket and felt lucky. An inveterate gambler, he had lost lately in Silk's Gold Room, in the rear of the club, but now he figured his luck was due for the upgrade. The scarred, flat-nosed guard knew him and opened the grilled door. He walked directly to the craps table in the center of the large room and bought \$50 worth of one-buck red chips. The table was getting a nice play. Gents from all parts of the country—graduates of jail, not Yale—tossed the cubes against the sides of the green-lined table.

A short pugpuss was doing himself some good at the far end. As Hammerton appeared the gorilla had made his fifth straight pass. The majority of the other bums were playing the line with him and sharing in the winnings. Hammerton wanted to play his own dough. However, when the pugpuss made three more passes, he decided to board the gravy special. Counting out half of his chips, he shoved them on the pass line. Pugpuss shook the cubes, made the usual

imbecilic incantations toward Lady Luck, then let them roll. They stopped rolling at 4, a 3 and 1. A tough point, thought Hammerton.

The next throw was Old Snake Eyes, or two 1's, and the third toss broke the winning streak and the heart of Zane Hammerton. To add to the insult, the 7 stopped directly under his fairly Grecian nose. He swore long, he swore loudly and didn't give a damn who heard. Why was the whole world against him? Why did he have to get all the bad luck? Thus we note the pretzel thinking of Zane Hammerton, he considered everything personal and a direct affront to his general welfare.

Ten minutes later the stickman tossed him the dice. He placed ten bucks on the pass line. His very first throw was craps—boxcars, the Big Boys. "The loser!" intoned the stickman. Hammerton looked toward high heaven and his eyes rolled in absolute anguish. Why, why, was his luck so lousy? In panicky desperation he placed his last fifteen chips on the lose line. His throw was swift and hard. The dice bounced against the far end of the table, rolled halfway back, and stopped at 8. "Eight-er from Decatur!" announced the stickman.

The second throw was craps, the third was craps and his fourth was likewise craps. Peevishly, he flung the dice toward the stickman. "Gimme another pair!" he yelled. Promptly a new pair rolled his way. He shook them viciously, tried to think of something lucky to say, couldn't, then let 'em roll. They stopped at the far end.

"Seven the loser!" announced the stickman. Hammerton was silent; sto stunned to curse. Yanking his gray fedora over his left eye, he stormed out and up to the club bar. "Gimme a Scotch and soda!" he snapped. He swigged it in a single gulp. He ordered another and his thoughts reverted to Joey Ganns and the business at hand. He began to feel better. What was fifty bucks, when two grand was practically in the poke?

H E BEGAN to rehearse his cleverness in framing the tap. First, he had got Joey the job at the joint via a want ad. Man power was still short; any bum could get a job and a helluva lot of them did. Joey got the job, helper to one of the drivers. He reported the lay the first night. Hammerton gave him further instructions. Joey stayed there one week and learned plenty. For instance, the payroll was every Tuesday morning. A guy named Walton Zimms was bookkeeper and paymaster. His office was on the second floor and you could see it from across the street.

The payroll was brought in by Farr Armored Car Service and placed on top of the safe, not *in* the safe. Joey didn't know why. However, the police could have told him, and everybody else, that it was poor business not to put it in the safe. Joey worked there a full week and quit. His 'brother'—Hammerton—phoned and said Joey was very sick and the doctor thought it was hyperstatic pneumonia.

How to break in? Boy, what a cinch! The lock on the side door must have been all the rage when General Grant wore a bib and toyed with a rattle. A good push with an ordinary screwdriver and a guy was inside. Then up one old flight of wooden stairs and the door to the office was another pushover.

Hammerton was all ready to drive to Miami. His clothes were packed in the car and it had been gassed, oiled, and checked. Joey wasn't going with him, but Joey Gann didn't know that. More, Joey certainly didn't know Zane Hammerton...

H E LEFT THE bar and walked over to the dirty-red booths and sat beside Ritzy Sill, an authentic moll-doll. She changed the color of her hair each time Cokey left for 'college.' At the moment it was flaming red and her man, Cokey Runter, was taking a postgraduate course at Atlanta Pen, instead of Penn State. Cokey's last demonstration of the low art of burglary was ill-timed and unfortunate. The store alarm went off and two cops, with extra large ears,

happened to be parked around the corner. Score none for Cokey Runter.

"Hi, kid," said Hammerton to Ritzy. "Looking younger every day."

"Thanks," smiled Ritzy. "How yuh doin'?"

"Right now, lousy. But in a few hours, swell. Er, got a couple of spare smackers, kid?"

"Sure. What's the percentage?"

"Trip to Miami hold your interest?" asked Hammerton. "With races, and plenty of swimming in nice, warm water?"

"No kiddin'?"

"No kidding," echoed Hamerton. "We start out a little after one o'clock. We can take turns driving. Just you and me, kid. Okay "

"Double okay!" enthused Ritzy.

"Got some summer clothes? We're leaving Times Square and winter and going to Flagler street and summer. Cokey won't mind."

"Cokey?" she grinned. "Say, *who's* Cokey? And have I got summer clothes! Miami, here I come!"

"Ata baby!" said Hammerton. "You better go home and pack. Write down your address and I'll drive around and pick you up. Right?"

"Double right!" She wrote the address on a paper napkin, passed it to Hammerton, started to leave. "I'll be ready and waiting, Sweet Boy. Miami; huh? That burg will just fit Ritzy!"

Hammerton went to the bar and had another Scotch and soda. He felt good, very good. He'd forgotten the fifty smackers lost at the craps table. His thoughts centered on Ritzy. He considered Cokey Runter strictly a lowbrow mug, wondered how Ritzy ever fell for the dope, the dope must have had some dough, mused Hammerton, which was very accurate musing on the part of Brother Hammerton.

WELL, NOW everything was all set. All he had to do was to meet Joey, get the two grand, tell Joey where to meet him on the morrow—when he would be driving through Maryland—and that was that. He walked to his room, four blocks west of Silk's place, and took

a final look around. Then he decided it would be smart to take a little nap. He had a lot of driving to do and wanted to make speed. He planned to reach Miami in a little over two days, driving night and day. Maybe Ritzy could spell him at the wheel, if he could keep her away from the gin. He dropped on the single bed and soon was asleep. Nearly three hours later he awoke with a start. He jerked his wristwatch under the light and noted it was 12:30. Joey must be waiting for him at Silk's joint. He dashed some cold water into his face, dried it, then rushed down the stairs.

Silk's was going full bloom when he arrived. He looked anxiously around for Joey Gann. No Joey in sight. He began to imagine things. He waited five, ten, fifteen minutes.

"Something's happened to the punk!" he thought, and walked out to his car. He drove to the Eli Crane Company, fifteen blocks south. Traffic was light. Mostly night-cruising taxis. The Eli Crane building was two light brick stories. Old, very old. Hammerton parked around the corner, then walked to the front of the place, and gazed up at the window where he knew Walton Zimms had his office.

The room was brightly lighted. This puzzled Hammerton. Why should there be a light after one o'clock in the morning? He walked back to a two-foot stone fence and looked again. He saw a semi-bald man lying across the desk, both hands stretched out in front of him. Hammerton's heart skipped two beats, something had backfired.

"The dope!" raged Hammerton. "The lousy little dope! He killed the guy. The dope. The lousy little dope!" He rushed back to his car. As he ran, another thought very painful, entered his head. "Why, the dirty, double-crossing little rat!" he fumed. "I bet he got the dough, after killing the guy, and beat it—the dirty, double-crossing little rat!"

He was outraged. The mere thought that Joey Gann should double-cross *him* was unthinkable and unpardonable. The screwy Hammerton mind could not conceive such a

breach of friendship. He raced his car beyond speed limits and soon reached Joey's house. It was one of those brownstone Gay '90's abodes with the standard and familiar *Furnished Rooms* signs on the front door.

JOEY LIVED on the third floor, rear. All was quiet when Hammerton entered, dim hall lights casting shadows in the corners. He raced up the two flights of creaky stairs and went to the room marked 5. The small watt light was on and, as Hammerton entered, he could see something or some one completely covered in the bed. He yanked back the covers and there was Joey. He began to moan and toss. Great sli-thering streams of sweat poured out of his face and forehead. His eyes rolled and opened and closed.

"Come on, you bum!" snapped Hammerton. "Where's the dough?" No answer from Joey.

"Lay off the ham act!" went on Hammerton. "*Where's the dough!*"

"Them hamburgers I et," mumbled Joey. "I'm sick."

Hammerton leaned over and cuffed him in the face with a left and right.

"Nuts to that stuff! Why did you have to kill the guy? And, for the last time—*where's the dough?*"

"Them hamburgers—" began Joey, and stopped.

"Listen," said Hammerotn and also stopped. He was convinced that Joey was putting on an act, certain that he had been double-crossed by his own stooge. Ssomething popped in his brain, like a rainbow of rage. He became a bull dreaming in total red. He quickly removed a .22 Colt Automatic from his left hip pocket and held it over Joey.

"Lok, bum," he said between set teeth. "This is all for you. For the last time—*where's the dough?*"

More moans and perspiration from Joey. He opened his mouth in an effort to talk but gave up.

Hammerton fired two shots, both at the heart. The covering rose and fell twice, shivered for a moment, then remained still. Hammerton replaced the hot gun back into his

pocket and ran out the door. As he started down the first flight of stairs, a high, shrill feminine voice screeched, "Stop him. Stop that man!"

Doors opened on all sides. Hammerton kept running. He had to get out, away from Joey. He made the first flight, raced around the bannister, and headed for the final flight. As he neared it, a large, masculine foot shot out and tripped him. Hammerton's head hit the side wall, then began to make a somersault descent down the rest fo the stairs. Each time he rolled his head hit something, landing with a final crack at the tile floor bottom. His legs jerked a few times and then he lay still.

Fifteen minutes later a young, blond interne removed the stethoscope from over Hammerton's heart and uttered four words, "This man is dead?"...

WE RETURN FOR a moment to the Eli Crane Company and go to the office of Walton Zimms, bokkeeper and paymaster. The time is now 1:50 a. m. He is still lying across the desk, hands stretched out in front of him. The muffled phone rings; once, twice, three times. Zimms moves, raises his head, then lets it fall back again in place. Again the phone—once, twice, three times. Zimm's head jerked up, his eyes opened, and he reached for the phone.

"Oh, hello, honey. I must have fallen asleep. I'll be right home!"

THE END

BUY
BONDS

By REX WHITECHURCH



THE IRON GOD

The kid had looks in plenty, but no voice. Someone had played a cruel joke, sending her to the city with hopes for fame bright in her. But someone else hadn't been satisfied with breaking her dreams—someone else had killed her.

I WAITED until Old Ben came down the iron steps and then I stepped into the enormous storage room, the walls of which were lined with crypts. It was the hard-and-fast rule that you couldn't fool around down here without the veteran morgue-keeper's special permission; and you had to have it in writing.

Nothing ever startled Old Ben. If he had any muscles in his face none of them worked. His dark eyes gleaned as they relentlessly scanned my pan.

"You again, shamus?" His voice cackled, a cross between an old woman's and a crowing rooster. But he wasn't angry.

"Where's the girl they picked up at the Palm Fan on Edmond Street?" I asked.

I sighed, relaxing, as I waited his answer. At the end of a long quest, I was almost enthusiastic. I was about to collect my five hundred dollar fee. After seven days of chasing the amateur vocalist all over the city, I'd found her—in the morgue. I guess the killer's bullet had traveled faster; had overhauled her in a back apartment on the third floor of a cheap hotel. But you could look out the window of her decrepit apartment and see one of the finest hotels in town.

My ex-soldier client was going to be plenty mad, and deeply hurt. But I couldn't help it. I'd prefer taking her back alive; but someone had found her first who had another motive.

I thought of the buck private who'd engaged me to find Jane White. She'd been trying to crash radio. I guess she didn't have what it took. Orin Sansell, the illustrious producer, told me her voice was fair, but had a crack in it like the Liberty Bell. I imagined, however, there was something else wrong. Sansell, a blond, put in hours in beauty shops, getting marcelled and waved. A plain country jane wouldn't appeal to him if she had an angel's voice. He didn't want to implicate himself with angels; they didn't appeal to him, either.

Harry Clay, my employer, had run the town ragged. For days he tramped the streets, listening for her voice. It was in late spring and windows were open. When he heard anyone singing, he investigated. But he'd never found Jane White.

I'd tried that, too, listening for a woman singing; but if Jane White ever practised, she didn't do it with her windows open. And from what Harry told me, she always was trying to improve her voice.

"You got a police permit to view the remains?" Old Ben swung gloomily to the crypts and yanked at one's handle. It came out on rumbling rollers.

"Sure," I said. "Detective Sergeant Greg Truitt's permission. He's your son-in-law, isn't he?"

Old Ben grinned. He flicked the sheet down from the dark girl's face. She had a sweet smile on her lips, but there was plenty of pumpkin in her. You could take a gal like that out of Plainville, but you couldn't take Plainville out of a gal like that.

I fumbled for the snapshot my client had given me. "I want you to tell me, Ben—is this dame one and the same?"

He adjusted his glasses, rubbed his heavy hands on his white jacket. Long and thoughtfully he studied the two faces. He looked back at the corpse. He nodded, "Even to the little blemish on her chin," he said.

"You speak in a voice that says five hundred dollars." I buttoned my trenchcoat because it had begun to rain. "Thanks, Ben. She believed so firmly in her ability to make fame kiss her hands, that she gave up love and all her friends. And—fame led her to the morgue. Never once did she feel fame's glorious lips on her rose petal fingers."

"Kind of poetic." Ben slid the crypt door shut.

* * *

I WAS ON MY way on the 22nd Street bus to the Palm Fan, trying to keep the facts straight. Jane White's picture would be on the front page of every gossip sheet in town

by night. Singer dies in quest of fame...the best descriptionists and sob sisters would be given a break. What they could do with such a story was something worth writing home about.

I climbed the steps to the forbidden front door of the Palm Fan. After an argument with the old man in the office, I obtained a pass-key. The old man's name was Morrissy. He looked like a skeleton in black clothes, with grave dust on him. I expected to hear his bones rattle when he moved.

"This is highly irregular," he complained, "unless you're a police officer." But arguing to himself, he led me to the creaky elevator and we all chopped our way to the third floor. He indicated a door on the right, down about the middle of the hallway.

I felt Morrissy was watching me. I had visions of specters from Civil War graves waiting to bat me with ancient weapons.

The apartment was small, decrepit, a five-dollar-a-week room. Cracks were visible in the door, like the seams in Morrissy's skeletal face. An iron bed, bearing a stripped mattress, stood in a corner. A piece of white oilcloth covered the spot stained with the girl's blood.

A dingy-tinted bathroom drew me. The walls were a bilious green. I saw a medicine cabinet on the wall. I don't know what I expected to find. But I knew I wasn't quite satisfied that the dead girl was Jane White, or had ever been Jane White. There wasn't anything in the bathroom.

I walked back out into the living room. I saw a hole in the window, with a paper stuffed in it. I plucked it out. It was a recent edition of the Plainville Courier Weekly.

I felt my pulses throbbing as the grim realization hit me that I'd found the clincher. Jane White had been shot to death in this room. From the window I could see the tall steeped tower of K.F.G.K. I understood now why the girl had lived here. Unable to pay the lavish prices of the fine hotel across the alley, she'd done the next best thing. At least she

was in sight of her goal, even though had she lived a thousand years she couldn't've made it.

* * *

THEN I heard a sound in the door.

I was looking out at an iron fire-escape, watching rain water pour from the eaves of the building past the glass. The shadow flickered on the red flowered wall paper because I'd turned on the low hanging light.

Morrissy stood there, his white locks falling around his ears. He resembled an officer from Lincoln's cabinet. He wore a G.A.R. pin in the lapel of his rusty black coat. He held one skinny hand behind him.

"I beg your pardon," he said sardonically, "but I phoned the police department. They said to get you out of this room. You're not a real officer."

"Who said what?" I stalled, wondering what he'd do if I didn't leave.

"Come on, git out of here. I guess you don't know a girl was murdered in this room last night. She was a very pretty girl, looked like Mrs. Abe Lincoln. We just don't want no notriety around here."

"Who killed her?" I asked casually, to kill time. I wasn't in a hurry to leave.

"Must've been the man with the beard." The Civil War veteran scratched his nose. But he still held one hand behind him.

The beard sounded wacky. "What color beard?" I insisted.

"Long and black. I told the police. He came in about eight, asked for Miss Sanders. That was the girl's name. I let him come up here. He never came down. He said he was her father. His beard was long and black. He was sort of stooped, wore dark glasses."

I nodded, gulped. But I stood still. Again those Civil War ghosts glowered at me from dusty space.

Suddenly the veteran's hand was hidden no longer. He shoved an old fashioned horse pistol at me. "Git," he said. "Grant said I was the best boy pistol shot in the Union Army.

I don't reckon I've lost none of my ability."

I wanted to laugh, but something about him warned me not to. With mock gallantry I bowed, stepped out of the room. He moved back, the gun more ominous than ever. The old guy was wacky.

* * *

THE YOUNG soldier was sprawled out in his hotel apartment. He waded to a deep chair. He was lean and brown and grim-looking. I'd heard him say Jane White had stopped writing to him when she'd made up her mind to seek fame and fortune on the radio. I sat down in a deep velvet chair. Knowing I'd been hired to find the girl, that nothing had been said about alive or dead, I wanted my fee. Jimmy Dolittle didn't make a living for his kids and wife by postponing payday.

"I've found Jane White." I tried to keep my voice steady. I was about to deliver a blow over the heart. Maybe he'd never get over it.

"Where?" His tone was sharp, querulous. He craned forward. His face was locked in strong lines. I knew what he'd been through, figured he could take it.

"In the morgue," I said succinctly, drawing the Plainville Courier from my pocket.

For a moment he didn't say anything. He was living through a hell worse than being in a shelled foxhole. I opened the paper, handed it to him. His hands shook when he took it. Sweat beaded on his upper lip. But the grim light didn't go out of his eyes.

"I was afraid you'd find her there." He dropped the paper, covered his face with his trembling hands. I didn't say anything.

"She gave it all up for bubbles!" he moaned. He got his legs under him. "Take me to her," he said. "I've got to see Jane—"

When we reached the morgue he began to recover somewhat. I led him down the iron stairway. Old Ben looked up from an open crypt. The girl's pale face was unshrouded. But

another man stood gazing down at her—Orin Sansell, the producer.

I didn't introduce them, got Sansell's arm and led him outside. I heard a quick sob torn from Harry Clay's throat. Grief had really knocked him for a loop.

"He's her country sweetheart," I said. "He hired me to find her. I guess I was too late."

Sansell's gray eyes searched my face. He brushed his impeccable tweeds, adjusted his four dollar tie. "The little simpleton—I tried to tell her to go home. She didn't believe me when I said she didn't have what we could use. Somebody had kidded her into believing she could make the Metropolitan Opera. One audition proved to me she'd never make the grade. She didn't have the talent."

His handsome face had a cloud over it. I wondered why he felt so jolted. It wasn't his fault, to give the devil his due. He couldn't help it because fate had sent the girl on a wild goose chase, that he'd had to demolish her hopes.

I CROSSED the corridor, leaned against the wall. I lit a cigarette. He stamped out his, putting a patent leather shoe down hard and grinding, like he was grinding everything out of his mind except what he wanted to keep there.

"Was she hard up?" I asked.

He looked at me quickly. "She was down to her last dime," he said acrimoniously. "I wanted to make her a loan, with no strings attached. She said she wasn't accepting charity. I never saw her again until a moment ago. I'll probably get blamed for her death."

"Why? You didn't kill her." I kept my voice low.

"Certainly not. Who'd harm a little nitwit like that?" He stomped off, clumped up the cold iron steps.

It was solemn, quiet in the storage room, like the hush over a funeral chapel just before the singing starts. I moved to the door. The buck private was coming out. He'd crammed his handkerchief back into his pocket, but his eyes were red-rimmed.

I left him at the hotel. He'd writ-

ten a check for the amount he owed me. "There's five hundred more, Shamus," he said, "if you can find the killer. Who'd want to harm Jane? She wasn't harmful, never hurt anyone but herself and me. She was just too beautiful; the folks back home flattered her too much. I knew she couldn't sing."

"I'm not closing the case, fella," I said. "I'll keep working at it. Maybe they know something over a police headquarters. I'll see."

He nodded, shut the door, turned the key. I galloped over to the station.

Detective Sergeant Greg Truitt was short and fat. He had a baby's pink complexion and always looked freshly barbed. He'd been literally poured into his blue uniform. I knew he spent hours polishing his brass buttons. On his modernistic desk was a glass vase of red roses, from his daughter who was the pride and pleasure of his heart.

"No, we don't know who killed her. The case is a mystery. Her face was literally torn off like an atomic bomb had exploded in front of her. Must've been someone had it in for her enough to spoil her good looks so she'd look bad in her casket. You can see what a stunner she was, Jimmy. Maybe somebody was making a play for her and got sore because he couldn't get no place."

The rain trickled across the windows.

"She burned the midnight oil, trying to coax the iron man over in the park to be good to her," he went on. "Kids like that seek out the city's iron man, the giant that governs the fate of all them that ain't got no talents and them that do have talents. They've always been overestimated by the kindly folks back home. They're flattered into believing they've got the world by the tail, come to the city and dream of conquering the iron giant. But the iron giant ain't got no soul, no heart. They can't kid him. He picks them up in his mailed fists, squeezes the life out of them and drops them on Skid Row. He's a god only to them that's got the stuff."

I nodded, got up, brushed my pants. "You still working on it?" I asked.

He smiled, but his voice was sarcastic. "Heck, this department never drops a murder unsolved, Jimmy. You know us better'n that."

It touched the brim of my hat. "If I learn anything," I promised, "I'll let you know."

I COULDN'T find my client, so I looked up Sansell. I had to climb to the fifth floor because the elevator operators were on a strike. He sat at a table loaded down with fan mail. A cigar was half buried in his mouth. His wavy blond hair reflected the lamp's dancing glints.

"Yeah," he said, as I took a chair before him, "I've got something for you—a letter that just came in from Plainville. It's from the kid's sister. We open all fan mail, Dolittle. It seems she wrote home she had a contract with K.F.G.K. But she must've fibbed. She claimed we were holding her back for a big advertiser, said she'd pull down a grand a week when she really got going. She'd make Plainville sit up and take notice. Isn't it pathetic?"

I nodded, snapped sweat. It was warm. "This epistle—does it shed any light on the murder?" I asked.

"Sure." He folded his arms, propped his elbows on the desk. "I almost forgot that. Her sister writes she must be on her guard against Clay. He was rejected by the army, but is masquerading as a soldier in uniform. He wrote a letter home to Jane White. In it he said if she ever let him down, he'd polish her off."

I fairly jumped at him, bent over the table, fumbled for the letters. He clamped down hard on my wrist.

"Not so fast, shamus," he rapped. "This is private correspondence. I've given you everything we've got on it. But— isn't it pathetic?"

I was half mad, but he ushered me from the office, shoving his green eyeshade up on his forehead. I couldn't kick. He helped me; he'd just the same as put a pair of handcuffs on the country lover's wrists.

I WENT BACK to my client's apartment. He still hadn't come in. I rang the bell several times. Disgusted, wondering if he'd lammed out of town, I decided to wait. Loitering in the hall I saw a blue uniform loom up suddenly. Greg Truitt walked to the door and rang the bell. Then I hustled out of my hiding place and tore back across town to the Palm Fan. I wanted to question Morrissy and decided to brave it out. He couldn't be so bad. I knew Truitt had found out about my client's connection with Jane White.

Morrissy growled at me from behind the little desk. He looked more than ever like a corpse that had been buried a long time. He answered my questions slowly, thoughtfully.

"I'd never seen the man with the black beard before. Right after he went upstairs the gun went off. I found the body. She'd talked to me. She'd had a sweetheart back in her home town, but she'd thought he was in the army. He'd been writing her letters. She'd known him since she was a little gal, she said. But she thought he was lying to her to win her sympathy about being in uniform; she thought I'd understand because I was in the Civil War."

"She thought he was lying to her?" I asked curiously.

"You know how gals are about soldiers when they're in uniform," old Morrissy said. "Take me, when I was in blue, Grant's orderly, I had all the gals in the country in love with me. I once told Grant—"

"Yes, sure, of course, but tell me more about the girl. Did she say she wanted to marry the soldier?"

"No, that poor gal looked like Mrs. Abe Lincoln and I thought a lot of her. She said her sweetheart was just pretending to be a soldier and—"

He stopped suddenly, leaned forward and said, "Don't you come back here no more. We don't want no noتریty."

I nodded, returned to my client's hotel and found Greg Truitt had returned, too. But he didn't see me. I watched him as he stomped to the door, rang the bell. That bell was sure getting a working over.

I wanted to speak to Truitt, only it wasn't a wise move. He was working against me because I still represented the bogus soldier—or did I? At any rate I let the detective sergeant leave, unmolested.

An hour passed. It was tough, hiding in that first class hotel, guests moving back and forth all the time. Once I slipped into an open linen room. A maid there was friendly. I watched Clay's door, but he didn't show up.

STANDING beneath the iron fire escape, I stared up at the broken window. It was a hard jump, but I made it. I skinned both knees on the bottom step. Rain beat at me. When I tried to raise the window, I found it locked. Reaching through the hole, I unfastened the latch. I'd been running around in circles for hours.

A man slued around, made an exclamation. I was face to face with Sansell. He was alone. A pass-key dangled from his hand.

"You gave me a jar," he scratched his chin. "Look here, shamus—how come you go prowling around like this?"

"What brought you over here?" I said grimly. "I'm beginning to think you know more than you pretend, Sansell." I thought a minute. "I came up here to avoid a run in with old man Morrissy. He wants to argue all the time."

"Sure. I know." The producer lit a cigarette nervously. "He marched with Grant. He hasn't come out of yesterday's gunsmoke. But if you think I'm involved, you're crazy. What do you want here?"

Skewing round, I started shaking the bed down, not that I figured the homicide men had missed anything—they seldom do. But in a coil of spring I found the gun. It was a .25 automatic. I let the mattress slump back on the bed. Frowning, I regarded Sansell with deadly suspicion.

"You sure you didn't know this gun was here?" I shot the question at him. He moved back toward the door. Suspecting he was about to make a break for it, I lunged at him. My hand closed on his shoulder. Then

he uncorked a sizzling right hook that crashed into my face.

Reeling drunkenly, trying to keep my legs under me, I fell across the bed. I heard Sansell swear. "You dumb shamus—you're worse than the old man!" He slithered out of the room, and I heard him moving along the hall.

Rubbing my bruised jaw, I tried to think. He hadn't meant anything by his action, had simply resented my insinuation that he'd murdered Jane White, and he'd patted me a good one without thinking. If he'd been involved, he wouldn't have stayed away from this room in broad daylight.

I went out the way I'd come in. But it took less than an hour to find the gun was worthless as a clue.

I left headquarters, with Greg Truitt fuming. How in heck had his best men missed that gun?

I could've told him. The gun had been hidden there by the killer after the cops had left the Palm Fan hotel.

PROFOUNDLY disappointed because my client was still away from his apartment, I went downstairs. A newsboy was calling out the headlines of the crime, reminding me that the story had been on the streets more than two hours.

It was after ten that night when I stepped from a darkened doorway and moved hurriedly toward the hotel's dimly illuminated facade? Morrissey wasn't at the desk. I stepped on the lift and ran it up to the third floor. The door of Jane White's room was open. I approached it carefully, grasping the small gun under my left armpit. When you've been in this business as long as I have, you know just about when to expect trouble.

A dark outline on the floor stopped me in my tracks. It was long, arms outstretched to make a grotesque cross on the carpet. I couldn't see very well from where I stood. But it was dangerous to barge into that room. I heard a creaking door. Determined, however, I suddenly shot forward, catapulting across the threshold, gun in fist.

Lying at my feet, his face shot away, was my former client. He was on his back. The slug evidently had

hit him straight between the eyes, making a hole big enough to shove a finger in. The chill gripping my spine, lingered.—What a sneaking, low down—

* * *

FOOTSTEPS came through the billious green bathroom. With the big gun in his knary fingers, the Civil War veteran stepped through the door. His black clothes loomed up, and he was like a corpse rising from a grave. I couldn't see him clearly because the low hanging light bulb rubbed my face.

Morrissey's voice jabbed viciously at me.

"It was self defense! I had to let him have a ball from old Betsy, consarn him. I'm going to let you have one, too. Back up there and toss your gun on the floor!"

I must've been too slow—

The gun blast nearly took the roof off. I felt my hat lifted off my head. Staggering back against the wall, I tried to calm my pounding nerves. The old man was a maniac!

Maybe he was bothered by the light, too. He was close enough now to make the next shot count. He reached up to paw the light out of his eyes, and taking advantage of this, I gently squeezed the trigger of my thirty-two. The little gun roared, but it didn't match the violent explosion of the heavier gun. Cordite filled the room, circling in blue wisps out the hole in the window. A shudder rocked me.

Morrissey stood there, drilled through the breast. A rosebud popped out on his white shirt in the V formed by the dangling strings of his ancient tie. A dead light glared out of his skeleton's eyes, deep hollows that belonged in the grave.

I wondered if he'd ever fall. His long fingers relaxed on the Civil War gun. It crashed like a falling brick. His skinny knees bent a trifle. They hit the floor together. For a second he wavered there, his heart still beating, a heart that had beaten for nearly a century. I saw him reach down with one lean hand to grasp the big revolver. But the effort was too much.

He toppled and lay on his face, with his feet trembling.

"Yeah, it was kind of crazy." Detective Sergeant Truitt lit a cigar, puffed at it laboriously, moved the red roses on his desk. "The old man was cracked. He was one of the few remaining Civil War veterans. He was proud of his G.A.R. pin. But he was young when he marched with Grant to take Richmond. He lived in the past. All the time his mind was failing."

I NODDED, another shudder darting through me.

"He wasn't lying about those whiskers and dark glasses," Greg Truitt continued. "We found them in the bogus soldier's apartment. He came back here and tracked her down, found out through the studio where she was hiding. She'd been warned by her sister to watch out for Clay. But he was smart. He went to a theatrical costume exchange, bought the black whickers and went to the Palm Fan to kill her. He'd already hired you. But he meant to kill her when you found her, Jimmy, if he couldn't find her. He figured having you working for him would be a sort of alibi.

"Tonight he went back. The old man found him in the room. Clay took the key when he shot the girl, went down the fire-escape, though. The old man pulled his Civil War gun, ordered Clay from the room, and when Clay wouldn't go, Morrissy blew his face off with the General Grant revolver. You remember, he threatened you with the same weapon?

"And when he saw you, knowing he'd shot Clay, he went ding bats again. He was living in the past—so far in the misty past; and you were a rebel invader. You know how it sometimes is with an old man's mind. But it's a good thing you shot him, Jimmy. Your wife and five kids would've been without a father and a husband."

He slapped me on the shoulder. "I guess the city's iron man crushed them to death, all of them," the sergeant added. "He didn't like them.

The girl had no talent. The iron monster favors only those who come to the city equipped with the ability to win, regardless of the field they're in... But—let's hear your story."

"Not much to it," I said. "I eliminated the only other suspect I had because he has blond hair. Black whiskers don't go so well with blond hair, in case he lost his hat. Besides, Sansell came over to the room and got the key at the desk. This told me he'd been there before. But it was broad daylight and he'd come over there to see if he'd left anything, ever, when he was calling on pretty Jane White. I knew he was covering up something, but it wasn't murder. He'd lied about the girl not having any money. He'd made her a loan and she'd taken it.

"I found out she'd bought a ticket to New York, while I was running around in circles. That's why Clay killed her. She was using Sansell's money to follow fame's deceiving finger. Clay couldn't take it, so he eliminated her, rather than to give her up. He'd done this on impulse because his grief was genuine at the morgue.

"He'd taken the ticket. I found it in his room when I went back there and coerced the linen room maid to let me in his apartment. But he didn't come back. I found a hundred dollar bill with the New York ticket and Sansell's card, with best wishes for a New York success, with the stuff. When Clay didn't come back, I guessed he'd seen you cops at the hotel, got scared and beat it. He'd planted the gun in the murder room after he'd shot the girl and after you cops had left, going back through the fire escape the way he'd left. That's why your men didn't find the gun when they were there. He was smart, conceited, wanted to make fools out of the lawmen. That's why he put the gun back there.

"But he got to figuring with those grim man hunters after him he might need the gun. So he went back after it. I hid in a doorway across from the hotel, figuring he was bothered and knew you were on his trail. There was a slim chance he'd go back

(Continued On Page 95)

A MATTER OF MINUTES



By E. STARR

*There in the darkness and rain-filled night,
a man waited alone for his brother to come
home—with blood on his hands!*

IF course I tried to do all the usual things to pass the time. I picked up a book and turned the pages at about the right intervals; I tossed another hunk of wood on the fire, and stirred up the

leaping flames in the grate; I walked over to the window now and then and pretended that I just wanted to see whether the rain was letting up. And every minute or two I told myself there was nothing to worry about. Joey never had done anything very bad in his whole lifetime; he wasn't going to start off now by murdering a man.

But every time I looked out of the window and saw the trees and the great wildness of the wind in them, and the rain lashing through them and sweeping and surging down in the black night, the more worried I became. It wasn't that the weather had anything to do with Joey, or with his fury at Lem Matthews. It was just that the violence of that night out there made other kinds of violence seem almost inevitable.

Besides, I could see part of the rutted road from the window. When I looked it seemed that at any minute the wagon would come jogging along through the rain toward the cabin, with Joey in it, coming home. But always the road was empty.

I kept wishing I had somebody to talk to. My nerves were tightened into a tense, quivering net all over my body. I wondered what Joey would say if he could see his calm older brother prowling around the wind-shaken cabin like a nervous cat, evoking dark images of bloodshed and death. Would he laugh? Or would he say, "How did you know? How did you know I went out that night to kill Lem Matthews?"

Memories of the past week crawled in and out of my mind like little black spiders. I couldn't brush them away. I heard the scene on the porch all over again; the scene between Joey and Beliza that I hadn't wanted to hear, but had not been able to avoid.

"I can't help it, Joey, don't you understand? Do you think I like it this way?" Beliza's thin, sweet girl-voice had quavered high, so that although they were out on the porch and I was inside the cabin with the door closed between us, I heard every word quite plainly. Through one of the windows I could see them stand-

ing together, my kid brother and his girl.

Joey and Beliza had loved each other since childhood. I had seen them together thousands of times, laughing and talking. But this was something different. Joey's face looked crumpled and miserable and childish, as though he were a little boy instead of a tall, broad-shouldered nineteen-year-old, and even through the window I could see that Beliza had been crying. I was uneasily surprised. It never had occurred to me that those two kids had anything to worry about. They were in love; Joey had a good job, and within a few months they were going to be married. I had brought Joey up since our parents died, and I thought I knew him inside out. But now I felt ashamed to be watching and listening to something that obviously was not meant for me.

Still, I couldn't help hearing them.

"What about us?" Joey said.

"I don't know. I can't help it. I know I love you, Joey; I've loved you my whole life, but sometimes when I see Lem..."

"How can you talk like that? He's nothing but the lowest kind of a rat, and you know it. You always said so. There isn't anybody with a good word to say for him. And besides..." Joey's voice rose, "We were always gonna get married, you and me. Always. Since we were kids. I don't see what Lem Matthews had to do with that. We were..."

"Joey!" The tears were running down Beliza's small pale face, and she brushed at them wildly with the back of one hand "I'm going to try to get over it; I told you that. Maybe I can, and maybe we'll get married, just like we always planned. But if I can't..."

She turned away from him, sobbing, and I could hear her quick footsteps on the porch, and through the window I saw her slight figure running along the road away from the cabin. Joey stood still, looking after her.

Then, suddenly, he seemed to be caught up in the wave of hurt that swept him. "I'd like to kill Lem

Matthews!" he shouted furiously. "I'd like to kill him!"

I'll have to admit that, at the time, I didn't worry much. I knew it was natural for Beliza, at seventeen, to be attracted to someone like Lem. He was a big, handsome guy, with enough cruelty in his face to have a sinister fascination for a very young girl. And there was his part-ownership in the mine, the swagger that comes from having more money than your neighbors. To most of us, that swagger was not endearing. We considered Lem to be more or less what Joey had described him: the lowest kind of a rat.

There was his treatment of Ephraim Maine, for one thing. Ephraim had worked in the mine for most of his life, and worked hard. Then, without warning, Lem threw him out in favor of a younger and abler man. It was true that Ephraim could be quarrelsome and disagreeable; but he hadn't deserved that, and we held it against Lem.

Maybe Joey wouldn't have taken it so hard if Beliza had fallen for some other man. I tried to explain that she was going through a fairly usual phase, that it wasn't deep and it wouldn't last; she needed only to grow up a little. But Joey didn't see it that way. To him, the situation was that Lem Matthews had stolen his Beliza, and my kid brother was fighting, swearing mad.

If I didn't worry at the beginning, I soon made up for lost time. It's just a small valley mining town with cabins scattered among the hills, but everybody knows everybody else. Within a couple of days friends were giving me accounts of Joey's new behaviour. He was spending a lot of time in town at the saloon, shooting off his mouth about how much he'd like to kill Lem Matthews. He didn't see Beliza. At home he brooded silently, and his face got strangely taut and abstracted with the struggle, that was going on inside him.

Then, just five or six days after the scene on the porch, he told me at breakfast, "I'm going to see Matthews tonight. It's Sunday, and every Sunday night he stays home to go

over the books. I want to see him; I want to tell him what a rat he is."

Joey spoke in the cold, expressionless voice that covers a subject without leaving any room for argument. Nevertheless I argued, hour after hour for nearly the whole day. I bawled him theless I argued, hour after hour, for nearly the whole day. I bawled him out, ordered him to stay home, and even pulled the routine about not starting any trouble "for Beliza's sake." It didn't make the slightest dent. Joey seemed to have grown suddenly too old to be told what to do. He said he was going, and right after dinner, in the first drizzle of rain, he hitched up the wagon and left.

It wasn't until he'd been gone about an hour that I discovered my gun was missing.

* * *

THERE was nothing I could do; that was the worst part of it. I tried Lem's number several times, but although my own phone was all right, the storm had brought down some wires farther up the valley. He couldn't be reached.

I thought of walking the half-mile or so to our nearest neighbors, borrowing their wagon, and setting out after Joey. But he had an hour's lead on me, and the trip to Lem's took nearly two hours. By the time I got there, whatever was going to happen would have happened, and Joey would have started for back home. I just had to wait, that was all.

I waited turning the pages of a book, stirring up the fire, looking out of the window at the rain, I waited; and still Joey didn't come, and the wagon was nowhere in sight on the road.

I was more nervous than I'd ever been in my life. When the telephone rang all my muscles jerked reflexively, and my skin crawled in the peculiar, chilling way that is like fear walking.

I took the receiver off the hook slowly. "Hello," I said.

"Bob?"

I recognized the voice. It was Rick

Petersen, who acted as sheriff for the whole district. I liked Rick, but now all I wanted to do was hang up, cut him off, and stay suspended there in the cabin, waiting. I didn't want to know anything. I didn't want to hear anything.

"Hello, Rick," I said.

"Listen, Bob, I called to find out..."

"I can't hear you very well," I said.

He talked louder, and it was like listening to a sputtering fuse that has an explosion waiting at the end of it. "I called to find out if Joey's there, Bob. Is he there with you now? It's important. If he's there, put him on."

"No," I said. "No, he isn't here."

"He isn't? It's a bad night, raining to beat the devil. Where would he go on a night like this?"

"It wasn't so bad when he left, Rick. Not raining so hard."

"Have you got any idea where he is? Where could I get in touch with him?"

"Well..." my hand was cold and damp around the receiver. "Well, I guess he'll be back pretty soon. Any message? Anything you want me to tell him?"

THERE was a pause, and then I could feel a queer, live sympathy coming to me over the wire, like a physical thing; coming to me from Rick.

"Listen, Bob," he said brusquely. "Lem Matthews has been murdered. Somebody heard the shot and sent for me, but nobody saw the murderer."

There was a small, isolated moment of silence. I stood holding the receiver, and I felt queerly numb and lightheaded, the way they say a man feels when he's freezing to death.

"Will you do something for me?" Rick said. "Have Joey phone me the minute he comes in, just as soon as he walks in the door. You know how important it is. Will you do that, Bob?"

I managed to get the word out, "Yes;" and fitted the receiver back on the hook. My book lay open on the chair in front of the fire. I threw it on the floor and sat down, listening to the rattle of rain against the win-

dows, and the surging sound of the wind. I waited for minutes that couldn't be measured, each one a lifetime.

Then I began to cross the room and look out of the window again, but I was afraid to do it because the wagon might not be coming along the road, and that would be worse than not looking.

I kept hearing something over and over again in my mind, Joey's voice shouting, "I'd like to kill Lem Matthews! I'd like to kill him!" It rang hollowly in my mind, like the deep ghost-call of an echo. I tried not to hear it, but there it was "I'd like to kill him!"

A log cracked in the fire. Part of it rolled onto the hearth. I swore at it and kicked it back viciously with my foot so that a bright geyser of sparks went up the chimney. Again I tried to decide whether or not to look out of the window.

Very suddenly, the door of the cabin burst open. The wind swept in, and a gust of rain; and then Joey stood in the doorway. He slammed the door behind him.

"Joey," I said.

"Listen, I don't feel like talking, okay?" His clothes dripped a trail of water as he moved over toward the fire. His face was white, with the rain streaming down it.

"You've got to tell me what happened," I said. My voice sounded loud and strained.

He turned on me angrily. "Why can't you mind your own business? I'm not a kid any more; leave me alone." He stripped off his coat and held his hands close to the fire, dropping the coat to the floor. I noticed that it fell lightly, without much weight. There was no bulge in the pockets of his trousers.

"What did you do with the gun?" I said. "Where is it?"

"Will you leave me alone?"

"What did you do with the gun?"

"None of your business."

"It's my gun," I said.

"Yeah." He looked at me over his shoulder, and nodded reluctantly. "That's right. I shouldn't have taken your gun."

"What did you do with it, Joey?"

"Threw it in some bushes, off the road. I thought..."

"Where?"

"When I was about a quarter mile away."

"A quarter of a mile from here?"

"From Lem's cabin. Aw, leave me alone, will you?" His voice was suddenly muffled, and he kept his face turned away from me. "I'm sorry I took your gun. I don't know why I did it. And then I was afraid to have it on me, so I threw it away."

I LOOKED at him standing there with his back to me, my kid brother, and a terrible helplessness made me feel sick. I wanted to say, "Don't worry. We'll go now, in the darkness, as far and as fast as we can." But I didn't say it, because I knew it wasn't any good. Rick Petersen would track us down. He was a friend, but he was also a completely honest man.

"Joey," I said. "There's only one thing we can do. Will you do it?"

"What?"

"Phone Rick Petersen." I spoke just as steadily and calmly as I possible could. "He knows all about it. Somebody heard the shot, and he knows Lem's been murdered. He's after you, Joey."

Joey spun around. He stared, with a tense, horrified face.

I said, "You've got to call him and tell him you're here."

"Are you crazy?"

"It'll make it easier on you later, you know that. It's always easier if you give yourself up."

"But that's the same as admitting I did it!" Suppose I tell him I was at Lem's...I wouldn't stand a chance!" He looked at me wildly, and looked at the phone as though it were a terrible, unconquerable enemy. "No...I'll never admit anything, never; I'll never even say I went to Lem's, I won't phone! And if they asked me, I'll say I was right here all the time!"

"Joey, don't be a fool. Rick called here, he knows..."

"Did you tell him where I went?"

"No."

"Then how does he know I was

with Lem if you didn't tell him?"

"Joey, you don't like being told what to do. But I'm telling you now, and you've got to listen to me." I was trying so hard to make him understand. I was cold with sweat and with the vital urgency of getting him to that telephone. If he lied or ran away he'd be hunted, tracked down, treated like a hardboiled killer. The chances were better, a hundred times better for him, if only he would give himself up. "You've got to do what I tell you. Get over to that phone now, Joey. Don't waste any more time."

I had gotten up from the chair almost without realizing it, and now we stood facing each other. It was as though we were antagonists; not brothers, not even friends. Joey looked at me with a sort of frantic defiance. His shoulders were hunched forward tensely, and he was biting down hard on his lower lip. I could almost see his mind working; the pretenses that must be going through it, the elaborate, pitiful lies.

"Listen." His breath came with a short, sharp sound, in between the words. "I didn't kill Lem. I took the gun, sure, and I wanted to kill him, but then... I changed my mind. I threw the gun away *before* I got to his cabin. I was afraid I'd get mad at him, see? I was afraid I might shoot him if I had the gun, and I didn't want to anymore. Nothing happened. I mean, I just told him off about Beliza. We traded a couple of punches, but that's not murder, is it?"

"No." I felt strangely tired. "No, that's not murder."

HE PICKED it up eagerly, trying to convince me. "Then it would be dumb to phone Rick, wouldn't it? Why should I even admit I went there? There's no sense to it. You can see that, can't you Bob?"

I rubbed one hand over my eyes, trying to work up strength enough to say what had to be said next. It was hard. The hardest thing in the world. Finally I managed to say it. "I'll have to turn you in myself, Joey. I'm going to call Rick and let him know where you are."

His eyes widened. He began to

edge between me and the phone, with the crafty desperation of the hunted. "You wouldn't do that. You can't. You can't."

"Get away from the phone."

"I won't let you do it. You're my brother. You don't want to send me to jail."

"Get away from the phone."

He stood braced, staring at me, and for a moment I went a little crazy. I took a swing at him, and heard my fist cracking against his face. He fell sprawling on the floor.

Automatically I went to the phone, and automatically I gave Rick's number. I could feel Joey's eyes on my face. He was crouching, half lying on the floor, leaning against the wall.

I wanted to hang up. I nearly hung up as the faint ringing sounds came over the wire, because there was still time. Rick hadn't answered yet. But then I thought again of how it would be for Joey, always running away, someday getting caught, and being frightened, frightened for so long, instead of having everyone go easy on him.

The ringing sound broke off, and Rick's voice was there instead. I took in a long, painful breath.

"Rick," I said, "Joey's here now. If you want to speak to him, he's here."

"He is? I sure do! Why, Bob—that makes everything all right. That's what I wanted to hear."

Dimly, I realized that there was relief in Rick's voice. Relief, and a tone almost of congratulation. I couldn't understand it, but it was there.

"Ephraim Maine must have killed Lem," he was saying. "See, Joey couldn't have gotten from Lem's cabin to yours under two hours. More, on a night like this. And we heard the shot only thirty minutes ago, get the idea? Joey being there with you proves that there was no way he could have done it!"

I felt as though I were coming alive again, all over. I couldn't speak, but I held onto the phone, listening. I wanted to hear everything Rick had to say.

"Brother, is it lucky you called me right away! It was just a matter of minutes—I mean Joey's alibi would have been gone, if you'd waited. Put the kid on, Bob. Let me hear his voice."

As I turned away from the mouthpiece, I had a confused, ridiculous idea. I wanted to shake the hand of Alexander Graham Bell.

THE END



Also

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IN OUR NEXT ISSUE OF

**CRACK
DETECTIVE
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MAKING A MAN'S WORD COUNT

By KENNETH P. WOOD

A CURIOUS RITE was enacted recently in the police court at Cambridge, England, when Fan Hung a Chinese student, testified against his landlord, William Yates, charging that the latter had defrauded him of considerable money while handling the drafts sent to him from his parents in China to defray his expenses.

On taking the stand Fan Hung waved aside the Bible and asked the court to supply him with an ordinary dish in order that he might take oath after the custom of the Chinese. Legal procedure was delayed while officers scurried about to comply with the odd request. Finally a china saucer was located and presented to the plaintiff who struck it against the witness box. It broke on the third attempt, then Fan Hung swore that if he did not speak the truth his soul would break like the saucer. The truthfulness and integrity of the Chinese being proverbial, the student's sworn statement cinched the case, and before it was ended Yates admitted his guilt and agreed to make restitution.

To the average man of today an oath means a solemn assertion, and little else. Oaths meant more, in the days when Harold swore to give up England to William the Conqueror. But when the Saxon prince suddenly decided to keep the crown for himself, his perjury filled his followers with gloomy forebodings that the saints would be against them. It was the medieval custom to make the swearer take oath on holy relics, without which the vow was thought scarcely binding—and Harold's breach of faith was thought to have outraged every saint over whose sacred relics he swore.

The ancient theory of an oath was that it represented the invocation of some divinity, as a third party, who should bring down retribution if the

vow were not kept. Solemn rituals and sacrifices, varying in form with different nations, called the gods to witness, and secured their vengeance upon the oath-breaker.

The English Quakers of the seventeenth century were the first to protest effectively against the old style oath. They refused to do more than make a simple declaration of facts. At first they were persecuted and disciplined, but eventually, their trustworthiness gave them standing with sworn witnesses.

At one time many "professional perjurers" loitered about the steps of English court-houses. For a consideration, these individuals would give any evidence, upon oath, that might be required. During a depression any number of these men walked openly through Westminster Hall with a straw in one of their shoes, to signify that they wanted employment as witnesses. From this originated the saying: "He is a man of straw"—hence a "strawman." But the practice itself is very old, and can be traced back to ancient Greece.

Today in England as in most parts of the United States the statutes allow witnesses to swear according to the forms prescribed by their beliefs. In other countries, the custom varies and it is often curious as can be seen from the following methods.

In China, there is a touch of the grotesque, as well as the solemn, in the mode of administering oaths. When a Chinaman swears to tell the truth he kneels down, and a china dish is given to him. This he proceeds to break into pieces, and the following oath is administered:

"You shall tell the truth and the whole truth. The dish is broken, and if you do not tell the truth your soul will be broken like the dish."

Other symbolic variations of the Chinese oath are the extinguishing of a candle or cutting off a cock's

head—the light of the candle representing the witness's soul and the fate of the rooster symbolizing the fate of the perjurer.

IN PARTS OF India, tigers' and lizards' skin take the place of the Bible of Christian countries, and the supposed penalty of breaking faith is that in one case the witness will become prey of a tiger, and in the other that his body will be covered with scales like a lizard.

In many Mohammedan countries the witness takes the oath with his forehead reverentially resting upon the open Koran. He holds his Bible in his hands, and, bending low, as if in the presence of a higher power, slowly lowers his head until it touches the Book.

In Spain the witness kneels solemnly before the Bible and places his right hand reverently upon it. The judge then asks him:

"Will you swear, in the name of God and His Holy Book, to speak the truth in answer to all questions that may be asked you?"

The witness answers: "I swear."

The judge then concludes: "If you do this, God will reward you, but if you fail, He will require an account of you."

The Austrian takes his oath in front of a crucifix, flanked by lighted candles. With upraised right hand he says:

"I swear by the all-powerful and all-wise God that I will speak the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in answer to any question that may be asked in this court."

While taking the oath in French courts, the witness raises his right hand toward the crucifix which invariably hangs on the wall just above the judge's head.

In England and Scotland, the witness formerly kissed the Bible prior to being sworn, but this custom which has been in practice for centuries, is fast becoming obsolete as detrimental to the public health.

Perhaps the most impressive of all is the oath taken by the Norwegian who raises the thumb and first two fingers of his right hand. These three

digits represent the Trinity. The witness then repeats a long formula, ending with the wish that if he swears falsely he may be punished eternally in hell and all his earthly possessions destroyed.

What is regarded as the quaintest oath still in use is that which is embodied in the ancient Manx Laws, and administered to high court judges on the Isle of Man, where everything is quaint, even the laws. It is called the "fishbone oath," and is as follows:

"By this Book and the contents thereof, and by the wonderful works that God hath miraculously wrought in the heaven above and the earth beneath in six days and six nights, I do swear that I will, without respect of favor or friendship, loss or gain, consanguinity or affinity, envy or malice, execute the laws of this Isle justly between party and party as indifferently as the herring backbone doth lie in the midst of the fish. So help me God and the contents of this Book."

THE END



A COMPLETE NOVELET OF MIDNIGHT MURDER, AND A



Homicide's
by

SINISTER TRAP FOR THE MAN WHO NOBODY HATED!



MIKE HAMMOND shifted uncomfortably on the hard, wooden seat and squinted at the dark spot on the ceiling. His eyes drifted down to the thin, drawn features of the man on the other side of the bars.

"I know it sounds screwy," Jack Mason ran his fingers through his thinning hair, then tried with shaking fingers to fit a cigarette into his mouth. "I'm beginning to think that maybe I *am* nuts like everybody says—"

Mike Hammond fumbled through his pockets, came up with a battered paper package of cigarettes and a match.

"Let's leave that to the defense attorney," he grunted. "So far, you were taking the Clayburn-Greenwood back road because you were in a hurry to get back to town. Then what happened?"

The prisoner took a deep, nervous drag at the cigarette then flipped it across the narrow corridor.

"Like I was saying," he spit the words out as if he didn't like their taste, "I had a date with Evvie Andrews. I didn't want to keep her waiting—"

Mike Hammond nodded. He could understand hurrying under those circumstances.

"It was darker than hell. I'm five miles out of Clayburn when I see this guy." A fine film of perspiration beaded Mason's forehead. "So help me, Mike. The guy was at least ten feet tall—"

Mike Hammond's eyes were following the slow progress of the dark stain across the ceiling. He hung a crumpled cigarette from the corner of his mouth, drew a match along the sole of his shoe and applied the flame to the end of the cigarette.

"Mason's word poured out in a torrent, as though he was afraid of being interrupted. "I didn't see where he came from. He stands in front of the car and I have to either stop or hit him." He ran the back of his hand across his forehead. "He bends down like he's looking for something in the front of the car. Next thing I know

he's standing alongside of me." The prisoner pulled another cigarette out of the breast pocket of the gray cotton shirt he wore, lit it and exhaled a long feathery tendril of blue smoke. "This is where it starts to get real screwy, Hammond," he warned.

Mike Hammond grunted. "I'm listening."

The man behind the bars took a deep breath, then plunged ahead. "I take a good look at the guy, Mike, and I almost fall off the seat. Don't think I don't know how screwy this is going to sound, Hammond, but I swear by everything holy that it's gospel! When the guy's face looks in through the side window, he had a blue nose! Red whiskers, red eyebrows and a blue nose!"

Mike Hammond winced but didn't interrupt.

"He had a tin cup in his hand," Mason's voice came dangerously close to breaking. "Then he spoke to me. It was the kind of a voice you hear in a nightmare, deep and rumbling—"

"What'd he say?"

Mason took a deep drag on the cigarette, dropped it to the floor and ground it out with his heel against the concrete floor.

"Believe it or not, he asked me to have a drink with him. I figured him for some kind of a nut and decided to humor him. When I reached for the cup, he spilled it all over me." He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "He wasn't in front of the car no more, so I took a chance, slid it in gear and beat it. Last I saw of him, he was standing in the middle of the road, shaking his fist at me—"

Mike Hammond tilted the grey fedora so it covered his eyes. "Then what happened?"

Mason shrugged his shoulders. "I drove like Hell into Greenwood. There was a cop in the middle of the road. I tried to tell him about Red Whiskers and he snarls somethin' about lousy hit and runner at me. First thing I know I'm in the can and they're sayin' I killed a guy and that I was so raving drunk I didn't even know about it. Honest, Mike. I never took a drink that night—"

THE JAILER was a small, fat man with a shiny bald pate. He invited Mike Hammond to share his container of coffee. He thought Mason was a dead duck.

"Got him dead to rights, they did," he said. "Damndest wild eyed yarn you ever heard. Somethin' about a giant with red whiskers and a blue nose," he took a deep drink out of the paper container and shook his head. "No tellin' what you'll see when you get a snootfull of the stuff they sell these days—"

Mike Hammond sipped the hot coffee. "Drunk, huh?"

"Drunk? Sure, you could smell the stuff on him for two full days after we book him," Baldy snorted. "Must've been swimming in it, I'd say. Young Tom Clafferty's on the lookout for him, and when he flags him down, the young devil tries to sell him that story—"

Mike Hammond slid the container back on the heel scarred table, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "What put you on the lookout for him, chief?"

"Got a telephone tip. Somebody out Clayburn way sees this young rascal run down the dead man, gets his license number and phones it in—"

Mike pulled himself to his feet and stretched. "Tough on him if the guy that phoned in the tip got the plate number wrong, eh? That Clayburn Road's a pretty dark stretch—"

Baldy shook his head. "Not a chance, young feller. When we get his car to the police garage, one of the boys finds a wet smear on the front fender. Police lab says its human blood." He put a finger to his pouty lips. "Don't let on I told you."

"Understand they didn't identify the stiff, yet?" Hammond asked.

"Not that I know of," Baldy emptied the container, squashed it in his beefy hand and sent it caroming in the general direction of the waste basket. "Sent his prints down to Washington, though. May be on file down there."

Mike Hammond pulled a card out of his wallet, slid it across the desk. "Give me a ring when they find out who he is, will you?" He started for

the door, paused with his hand on the knob. "By the way, where can I get to see the guy who reported the accident?"

Baldy squirmed into a more comfortable position with his heels hooked on the edge of the table. "Can't rightly say. He ain't come forward yet," a sly smile creased the fat face. "My guess is it was some young feller out sparkin' somebody he hadn't ought to, and he's afraid to come forward. Lucky thing we don't need him, though, that blood on the fender an' all's enough for us—"

MIKE HAMMOND crossed the dusty road to the old frame building that was proclaimed by a creaking wooden sign to be the Greenwood Inn. He headed straight for the entrance marked "Bar."

Nobody was at the bar; a heavy-boned Swede was swabbing it with a wet cloth that left greasy circles.

"Double brandy," Mike Hammond ordered.

The bartender slid a glass across the bar, scooped up a handful of silver. Hammond leaned on the bar and stared disconsolately at his image in the back bar mirror. He smelled the brown liquid in the glass, grimaced and tossed it off in a gulp.

He shuddered slightly. "Domestic."

The bartender grinned a wide mouthed grin, exposing a handful of yellow, pitted teeth. "What was you expectin' in this tariff, bud? Cognac?"

Mike Hammond pushed the glass across the bar. "Hit it again," he said. He brought a cigarette out of his jacket pocket, and grunted cynically when the bartender poured the liquid from a bottle carrying a foreign label. A few drops spilled over the side of the glass onto the bar. The Swede lifted the glass and swabbed the bar with the wet rag.

Through the back bar mirror, Mike Hammond spotted Evvie Andrews in the doorway. Her eyes met his in the glass and she swivel-hipped her way across the room.

"Did you see him, Mike?" she swung up on the adjoining bar stool. "Did he tell you his story?"

Mike Hammond signalled the bartender. "Rye and soda for the lady." He watched moodily as the man behind the stick poured the drink.

"Yeh. He told me—"

The girl caught him by the arm and swung him around. "You don't believe him either, do you? You're just like the rest of these dumb flatfeet," she stormed. "You're so used to dealing with crooks and double-crossers that you don't know a straight guy when you meet one."

Mike shrugged his shoulders. "Okay. So he's not guilty. You got a better explanation?"

"It's as plain as the nose on your none too handsome face. He's been framed. Somebody's trying to—"

Mike Hammond grinned. "Sure, sure, he's been framed. Who by? What for? Has he got any enemies?"

"He hasn't got an enemy in the world," Evvie Andrews stormed. "He's such a grand guy—"

Mike Hammond shoved the fedora back on his head. "That's fine. That explains everything. He was framed because he has no enemies, no doubt. And how about the blood on his fender? Gremlins, I presume?" He nodded to the bartender to refill his glass. "Let's get this straight, Evvie. In the past you've given me some good breaks in that rag you write for. I told you I was dealing myself in on this mess. So, I'm gon'—a prove his story's true." He lifted the glass from the bar and downed it. "But that don't say I gotta believe it—"

A MUD spattered Chevrolet with a faded sticker on its windshield to proclaim it a taxi dropped Mike Hammond at the foot of the long flight of stairs that led to the second story entrance to the Greenwood Hospital.

He grunted his way profanely to the top of the stairs and through the revolving door. The heavy, sickish sweet smell of iodoform settled over him as he skidded across the highly polished tile lobby. A pert little brunette, her white cap perched precariously on the top of a mass of raven curls, smiled "May I help you?"

"I'm looking for the doc that rode

the meat wagon the night they found the stiff out on the Clayburn Road."

The brunette nodded and started plugging wires into the switchboard. She said something into the mouthpiece, smiled at what the earphones whispered back, and looked up brightly.

"Whom shall I tell the doctor is calling?"

Mike Hammond flashed his shield and registration card. "Mike Hammond, private dick." He was still puffing gently. "Tell him not to worry. I don't represent any finance companies, divorce actions or loan sharks. I just want some information—"

The brunette relayed the information. There was undisguised curiosity in her eyes as she directed Mike Hammond.

"Third door from the end of the corridor. Second floor."

Doc Matthews uncoiled his length from a leather overstuffed chair as Mike Hammond came in the door. He was lean, boyish and when he grinned little wrinkles cut white ditches in the tan of his face. Mike Hammond understood why the brunette at the switchboard beamed when the earphones talked back to her.

"Don't get up, doc," he said. "What I got to say can be said while you're sitting—"

Doc Matthews sank back comfortably into the leather chair. He waved toward the bed. "Sorry we haven't got but one chair in these cells. I'm afraid if I plop down on that bed I won't get up. But don't let that stop you from parking it there. What can I do for you?"

Mike Hammond accepted the invitation and plopped down on the side of the bed. "The guy that put that flight of stairs in front of this giddy palace of joy had the same kind of sense of humor as the guy that put the hill in front of the poor house." He looked around and lowered his voice. "What do they use around here to revive a guy that's on the verge of collapse?"

"Spirits of ammonia," Doc Matthews grinned.

"That's what I thought. I'll save

my collapse for more hospitable surroundings." He pored fruitlessly through his pockets, finally reached over to capture a paper pack of cigarettes laying on the end table at the head of the bed. "I'm Mike Hammond of Acme. Private dick. I guess the babe on the board told you that?" The interne nodded. "What can you tell me about the injuries of that stiff you picked up out on the Clayburn Road?"

"They were fatal."

Mike Hammond winced. "Maybe I didn't put it exactly right." He lit the cigarette, bunched the pillow and laid back on the bed. "I mean, were they the type of injuries you'd expect to find in a guy that's been knocked for a loop by a car?"

The interne shook his head. "Matter of fact they weren't, Hammond. The cause of death was undoubtedly a severe fracture of the occipital—"

Mike Hammond stopped him with a gesture. "Wait a minute, doc. My knowledge of anatomy is limited to what I could study from the third row at Minsky's. What's that break down to?"

Doc Matthews grinned. "Sorry. Let's see now. I guess the best way to describe it would be to say that his skull was cracked—"

Mike Hammond nodded. "Where? And how much blood was there?"

"The occipital bone, which is in the back of the skull, was shattered. There were other superficial injuries, but I'd say that was the cause of death. There was the usual bleeding from mouth and ears to be expected in an injury of that type, and one or two of the other injuries had bled fairly freely—"

Mike Hammond lay with his eyes half closed, watching the smoke from his cigarette spiral ceilingward. "That's funny, doc—"

"Funny?"

"Yeah. In that case, the dead guy must have stuck his head down and tried to butt Mason's car. Then, instead of gettin' knocked flat, he stands there long enough to bleed on Mason's fender—"

MIKE HAMMOND perched on the end of the bar stool and disconsolately munched on a cherry. A deep frown ridged the forehead that ran up under the battered grey fedora. He was up against a blank wall, and blank walls never ceased to irritate him. For two days he had tried to pick up the thread he thought he'd found in Doc Matthew's story, but it had only one end, and he was holding it.

He sighed once or twice, then, absently brushing the pretzel crumbs off the front of his vest, slid off the stool and ambled toward the lobby. He headed straight for the telephone operator in her little pen.

"Get me Al Sommers, Identification Bureau of the F. B. I. Fingerprint Section in Washington. Mike Hammond calling."

The girl nodded her blonde head pertly and proceeded to dial, entirely oblivious of the optical inventory the detective was taking of her assets.

Al Sommers was interested in his tale.

"Sure sounds like a screwy alibi to me, Mike," he told the detective, "but you know what funny things you see when you're ginned up. I remember once when—"

"Never mind the memoirs, Al. I got a hunch about this thing; it's too pat. There are too many things that need explaining—"

The F. B. I. man laughed. "You been reading too many detective stories, Mike. The guy's as guilty as sin. Everything's against him."

Mike agreed. "That's the trouble. Look, Al. What I really called you for: have they identified the stiff? The police chief sent you his fingerprints about a week ago—"

"I'll check. That was Greenwood. Unidentified casualty in motor accident. Right? Won't be a minute—"

Mike Hammond stared disconsolately through the booth door window at the blonde switchboard girl. He wondered just how emphatic her slap would be if he made a pass—

"Hello, Mike?" Al's voice cut through his reverie. "We've identified the dead guy. He's an ex-con. Just finished serving ten years in a

ten to twenty at Evansville State Pen—"

Mike felt a warm glow in the pit of his stomach that had nothing to do with four Manhattans.

"Good," he grunted. "What else you got on him?"

"I'll read this to you now. I'll have it transcribed and send you a copy for your files in the morning. All set? Here it is. Andy Willard, age 46, unmarried. Served ten years for grand larceny. A second story job. The guy that hel--d him was never caught. Got away with \$100,000 in negotiable bonds which were never recovered. First offense for Willard—"

"What'd he do before he was juggled?"

Sommers' voice cut through the humming of the poor connection. "He was on the stage, a juggler or an acrobat or something. That's all we've got on him—"

Mike Hammond grinned. "That's plenty. I'll check with you if I dig anything more—" He slammed the receiver back on the hook and walked over to the blonde telephone girl. He leaned over the side of her pen and whispered in her ear. Her hand flashed in a sharp arc and caught him flush on the side of the face.

Mike Hammond straightened up, soberly took a five dollar bill from his left hand pocket and put it in his right. He grinned at the girl. "That's what I thought."

The detective went back to the booth he'd just vacated and dialed the number of the *Globe*. Evvie Andrews was in the city room and the call was put through.

Her voice sounded tired. "Miss Andrews speaking."

"Ev, this is Mike Hammond. I think I'm on the beam. I may need some help. Can you get the rest of the night off—"

"You mean you think Jack didn't—"

Mike Hammond cut her short. "What difference does it make what I think? The important thing is that we may be able to prove he's been framed—"

Her voice perked up. "Where do I meet you, and when?"

"Not so fast. Where's Eddy Morrow?"

"Our Broadway snoop, you mean? Covering the opening at the Paradise, I guess. Anyway, that's where he's supposed to be. Why?"

"We're gonna need his help. I'll meet you at the Paradise in about a half hour. Wait for me in the lobby upstairs—"

THE PARADISE was a large, rambling and noisy club. As Mike Hammond walked in, twelve ponies and six shapely show girls were bringing on the floor show's finale. The orchestra was blaring noisily and the torcheroo, headlining the talent bill, was shaking the rafters with her coon shouting.

Evvie Andrews was sitting on the edge of one of the lobby chairs as Mike Hammond came up the stairs.

Eddy Morrow is in there at one of the ringside tables with Cap Kling and Billie Morrison," she said. "Tell me. What've you found out?"

Mike Hammond summoned the head waiter. "Tell Ed Morrow of the *Globe* that Mike Hammond wants him. We'll be over at the bar." When the waiter had gone, he caught Evvie by the elbow and piloted her to the bar. "Wait'll Eddie gets out here. Saves telling it twice—"

Ed Morrow had the look of a good reporter. Curious, sharp and tireless, his face was saved from a ferret-like appearance by the hundreds of little laugh wrinkles that puckered up the ends of his eyes.

"Hi, kids," he greeted them, and swung up on a bar stool next to Evvie's. "What's playing?"

Mike Hammond nodded to the bartender who shoved a brandy bottle over to the columnist. He watched while Morrow filled his glass.

"Want an exclusive story for your column, Ed?" he asked.

The columnist's ears did the next best thing to perking up. "That's the only kind I use," he grinned. "Who's it about?"

Mike Hammond downed his double brandy. "Jack Mason, Ev's boy

friend. "You know they got him judged on a manslaughter charge?"

Morrow nodded.

"Well, that wasn't manslaughter; that was murder. And Mason is being used as a stooge to cover it up and take the rap—"

Ev Andrews' fingers bit into his arm. "Mike, you're wonderful! But can you prove it? Can you find the one that did it—?"

"I need help. That's where you two come in. I've got a hunch, and if it works out, we're home—"

Ed Morrow downed his drink and nodded his head vigorously. "Count me in, Mickey boy. Who did it?"

Mike Hammond shrugged. "I don't know. That is, I have a pretty good idea who did it, but who he is, where he is I don't know. All right, wipe that dumb look off your pans. I'll explain—"

He shook a cigarette loose from a pack and threw the pack on the bar. Ev Andrews and Ed Morrow helped themselves. He lit all three cigarettes off the same match.

"This guy they think Mason killed is an ex-con. Name of Andy Willard. He was in show business. Mean anything to you, Ed?"

Morrow shook his head negatively.

"He's been away for ten years. Probably before your time," Mike Hammond explained. "He got mixed up in a bond robbery; the guy that pulled the job with him has never been tagged. The bonds never turned up—"

Ev Andrews slid off the bar stool. "How does all that help us?" she demanded. "What do you want us to do?"

Mike Hammond took two quick drags out of his cigarette then flipped the half smoked butt toward a handy cuspidor.

"My guess is that the guy that knocked him off is the guy that worked the bond robbery with him. I want to know all about this Willard guy, who he hung around with, what was the last show he worked in, what friends of his suddenly got wealthy—"

Ed Morrow's eyes reflected some of

his nervous energy. "That's all, eh? You want to know all about a guy that's been out of circulation for ten years, a guy that none of us knows—" Mike Hammond scowled. "Stop telling me how impossible it is. You know the gang down at *Variety*, Ed. Ramble through their files for about ten years back. And you, Evvie, maybe you can get some of the boys down at *Billboard* to help you. Between the two of you and two of the best theatrical papers in the business you ought to find something out about him—"

THE RINGING of the telephone sliced through Mike Hammond's deep sleep. He stirred irritably, reached for the phone and knocked it to the floor. It was Ed Morrow.

"You were right, Sherlock," the columnist chortled. "I got plenty on Andy Willard. He was a big time acrobat and stilt man—"

That acted like a dash of cold water. "Say that again!"

"Stilt man. He was in an act with another guy, name of—let's see, Tim Velie—"

Mike Hammond swung his feet out of bed. "What else did you find?"

"I checked on all the people in his last show. All but three of them are dead—"

Mike Hammond was already into his socks and was sliding his legs into his pants. "How about Velie?"

"I couldn't find out a thing about him, Mike. He just disappeared after that show—"

"Get hold of Evvie and meet me at the Alcambra Bar in half an hour. Before you leave there, get a picture of Velie—"


"Right. My watch says 10:23. That means ten to eleven at the Alcambra. Check?"

"Check."

It was closer to ten after eleven when Mike Hammond strolled in to the Alcambra. He stood in the doorway until his eyes became accustomed to the dimly lit interior. Eddy Morrow and Ev Andrews were in a booth close to the wall.

"A double brandy, Tom," he called to the bartender as he weaved

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CRACK DETECTIVE

his way through the tables towards the booth.

"Look at the bum," the columnist growled. "He's the detective, but he gets to go home nights and get some sleep while we spend the night burning our eyes out reading a lot of mildewed clippings in a moth eaten morgue—"

Mike Hammond slipped into the seat next to Ev Andrews. She looked tired, her hand shook as she lifted it to take the cigarette that drooped from the corner of her mouth.

"Willard was a tumbler and stilt artist with a couple of carnivals, according to *Billboard*," she reported. "Too bad he wasn't a tenor. Any jury would convict on sight—"

Mike lifted his brandy off the waiter's tray and set it down before him.

"Don't let me spoil your nice little party, but I'm going to do a little thinking out loud. If you've heard it before, don't stop me. I want to hear how it sounds."

Ed Morrow ordered another round for himself and Ev and leaned back in the corner of the booth.

"When I first got this case, I was convinced that Jack Mason was either hitting the joy stick or that he was guiltier than Hell. Everything pointed to him. The only thing in his favor was the fact that he was smart enough to get himself a gal like Evvie who stood by him—"

"Hear, hear," Ev Andrews murmured. She squeezed out the cigarette in her empty glass. "And then—"

MIKE HAMMOND emptied his glass, called over to the bartender to add a double brandy to Ed's order and continued. "And then a couple of things began to bother me. Baldy, the jailer over in Greenwood tells me that one of the strongest pieces of evidence they had against Mason was the fact that his fender was smeared with blood—"

"That sounds pretty convincing to me," the columnist murmured.

Mike Hammond shook his head. "Not entirely. In the first place, if Mason was drunk and did clip this guy, chances are that the body would

(Continued On Page 82)

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CRACK DETECTIVE

(Continued From Page 80)

have been tossed off to the side of the road and would have done its bleeding there. Just to make sure, I checked with the doc that examined the body—"

The fatigue had left the girl's face. She sat forward breathlessly and had to be tapped on the shoulder by the waiter to make room for the drinks.

"Know what he told me?" Mike Hammond continued. "He told me that Willard died from a fracture of the occipital bone—"

Ed Morrow stopped in the middle of dropping a couple of bills on the waiter's tray. "The what?"

Mike Hammond grinned. "The occipital bone. That's in the back of the head. Know what that means? It means that Willard must have tried to out-buck Mason's car. Another thing, he didn't do much bleeding—"

Evvie Andrews broke in. "But there was blood on his fender—"

"Right. And his license number was turned in by some unidentified public benefactor. And he *did* smell whisky. Now, if one of these facts could be explained away by Mason's screwy story they all could. So, when I convinced myself that the smear of blood on his fender must have been deliberately placed there, I decided that all the rest of his story must be true. I had to start out to prove it—"

Mike Hammond paused, clinked his glass against that of the girl and took a deep swig.

"I started with the assumption that somebody was deliberately trying to frame Mason. For three full days I knocked my brains out on that one and came to the final conclusion that he just happened to be a victim of circumstance. The guy responsible for Willard's death wasn't particular who he framed as long as he could keep his own skirts clear—"

Evvie Andrews was watching him with bright eyes over the rim of her glass. A frown ridged Ed Morrow's forehead.

"But how'd he ever expect to get away with it? It was a lead pipe cinch that somebody would recognize him?" the columnist pointed out.

Mike Hammond emptied his glass and returned it to the table. "That's

(Continued On Page 81)

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CRACK DETECTIVE

(Continued From Page 82)

where he was so diabolically clever, Ed. He figured that anybody who'd described him as a giant with blue nose, red whiskers and all would be marked down as a nut. Then, he had an even better inspiration. The surest way of having the guy's story discounted would be to make it look like he was sopping drunk—

"Then he never intended for Jack to drink that whisky?"

"No, Ev. He figured if he spilled it all over him Jack would smell boozy enough so's they wouldn't notice whether he had any on his breath. Next step was to get his license number, which he did when he stopped the car and smeared the blood on the fender, and call it in to the police. The chances of the cops missing Mason were pretty small, since he figured correctly that Mason's first move would be to get a cop—"

The columnist downed his drink, pulled a pencil and a sheaf of copy paper out of his pocket. "What a yarn! Now remember, the *Globe* gets it exclusively—"

Mike Hammond quieted him with a gesture. "Right. Now, take the things about the giant that were outstanding. First, he had a blue nose and red whiskers and red eyebrows. That could easily be done with a little make-up and spirit gum. Secondly he was a giant—"

Ed Morrow looked up. "Aha, now I see why you were so excited when I told you that Andy Willard and Tim Velie were stilts experts—"

MIKE HAMMOND nodded. "Right. That narrowed it down to Velie, in my mind. It also made the other pieces fit in. The crime for which Willard served time was a second story job. My idea is that Velie and Willard worked that job together and that Velie made his getaway—"

"Then when Willard served his time, he looked up Velie and wanted his split—" Evvie Andrews had forgotten her fatigue, her eyes were dancing.

"Right again. There was probably a fight, and Velie let him have it. Then came the necessity for getting

(Continued On Page 86)

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CRACK DETECTIVE

(Continued From Page 84)

rid of the body." Mike Hammond signalled for another round. "Wonder how long he worried about it before he figured this one out? This was a pip of an out. Not only does he get out from under a murder rap, but it doesn't even go down on the books as murder—"

Fatigue again dimmed the light in Ev Andrews' eyes. The corners of her mouth drooped. "All this is very fine," she said. "But where are we going to look for Velie, and how are we going to know him when we find him?"

Mike Hammond grinned. "I thought of that, too, my little dove." He turned to the columnist. "Did you bring that pictures of Tim Velie like I told you?"

Morrow nodded, dug into his inside pocket and came up with a glossy print.

"I got it like you said," he grunted, "but I don't see what good a picture taken ten years ago is going to do us?"

The waiter deposited three glasses on the table, scooped up a good sized handful of silver and departed.

Mike Hammond tasted his drink, and shuddered. "The only reason I keep drinking this stuff is that after you've drunk enough of it, it actually begins to taste like brandy."

Evvie stirred uneasily. "Never mind the bum jokes, Mike. How about it? How does a ten year old picture help us?"

"All right, all right. So you don't like my jokes." He finished off the brandy and replaced the glass on the table. "The reason I was late today is because I dropped by the *Globe* office and spoke to Al Rogers—"

"Al Rogers? What's he got to do with this?" Evvie asked.

"He's an artist right? He does artist's conceptions of things where you can't get pictures. Right? Okay, so I'm giving him Tim Velie's picture and he's going to give me an artist's conception of how he looks after ten years—"

Evvie started to protest. "B-but—" "How do you know if he's bald or half bald? Maybe he got wrinkles

HOMICIDE HARLEQUIN

maybe he didn't—" Eddie Morrow pointed out.

Mike Hammond nodded. "Right. And what were you going to say, Ev?"

"I was going to make the same observations—"

Mike Hammond nodded again. "Okay. What we do in that case is we have him make a dozen sketches. Some bald, some with thinning hair, some grey, some wrinkled, some smooth faced, some with a mustache, even a beard—"

"And then what?"

"Then we do a little canvassing." The detective leaned back. "My guess is that Velie is holed up somewhere within a ten mile radius of the place where his ex-partner was found. Since he's probably become super-respectable, everybody will know him in his new identity. All we have to do is find somebody in Greenwood that will recognize one of those sketches!"

THE CLERK in the outside office of the Greenwood Police Department was doubtful about letting Mike Hammond, Ed Morrow and Evvie Andrews in to see the chief.

"The chief's grabbing a little shut-eye," he protested. "He's been putting in some tough hours."

Mike Hammond brushed the objection aside. "Tell him he's making a mistake that will make a laughing stock of his department—"

The chief told the clerk to send them in.

He was sitting on the end of a leather couch, running his fingers through his hair. He was yawning luxuriously as they came in.

"Hear you're goin' to save my department's honor," he grinned. He indicated a couple of chairs, "Sit down, I'll be with you in a minute."

He walked over to a sink in the corner half hidden by a screen and slapped cold water in his face. Mike Hammond took possession of the big leather overstuffed next to the desk, while Evvie and Ed Morrow sat down on the warm couch.

"Suppose I told you that that so-called hit and run killing out on the

(Continued On Page 84)

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CRACK DETECTIVE

(Continued From Page 87)

Clayburn Road that you're set to send Mason to the can for was murder and that he didn't do it?" Mike Hammond began. "What would you do?"

The chief dried his face on a towel, hung it back on a nail over the sink, ran a comb through his tangled hair. "Send the killer to the chair."

Mike Hammond untied a large package he held on his lap and took out a pile of pictures. "The murderer's picture is among these," he said. "You run through them and pick out the one that looks most familiar to you—"

The Chief denuded a stick of chewing gum of its wrapper, folded it carefully and shoved it in his mouth.

"Let me get this straight," he said. "You want me to pick out whatever picture in here looks familiar to me?"

Mike Hammond nodded.

"Got any facts to back it up?" the chief demanded.

Evvie Andrews stirred on the couch. "He's got it all figured out, chief. He's been doing a Sherlock Holmes all day, only instead of using a needle, he's been using cognac—"

The chief disregarded the interruption. "You're going to prove to me that the hit and run killing—"

Mike Hammond paused in the act of shoving a cigarette into his mouth to interrupt. "Hit and run killing my eye. That murder was as much of a hit and run killing as that belly-wash I been drinking all day was cognac. Find the guy in that pile that you know and you won't only be clearing up the death of Willard, but you'll be solving a ten year old bond robbery at the same time—"

The chief leaned forward and wordlessly studied picture after picture. "You know," he said finally, "all of these pictures are hauntingly familiar to me, but I can't quite place who it is—"

He turned three more, then snapping his finger he pounced on the picture of a thin man with a mustache. "That's who it is. Of course. I recognize him now—"

Eddie Morrow was on his feet. "Who is it, chief?"

The chief slapped the picture with the flat of his hand. "He has a small

(Continued On Page 90)

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CRACK DETECTIVE

(Continued From Page 88)

estate out on the Clayburn-Greenwood Road. He's very well known in town—"

Mike Hammond had forgotten the cigarette that dangled disregarded from his lip. "Never mind that, man. What does he call himself?"

The chief looked startled for a minute. "Call himself? Wh-why we know him as Tim Velie—"

"Tim Velie!" Mike Hammond sprang to his feet. "I guess I never considered that possibility—"

(THE END)

KING OF KILLERS

(Continued From Page 50)

trick's explanation lay in the name he was told to ask for. 'Mr. Abercrombie' meant one card—say, the six of spades. If he'd asked for 'Mr. Callahan' that would have indicated to the man in Chicago that the card drawn was the nine of hearts. Understand now?"

"Sure! A different name for each card." Reeves snapped his fingers. "Then—when Kamus called Tippy, and you told him to ask for Mr. Johnson, that meant—"

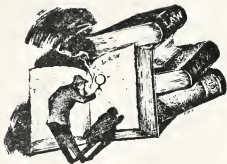
"Meant something extremely fishy was afoot. I had a bad couple hours wondering whether Tippy would be smart enough to figure out what I was driving at. I shall not underestimate my boy again! You see, Lieutenant, Tippy's name is Murgatroyd Tip, while 'Mr. Johnson'—in the code we have both memorized—indicates the *King of Clubs!*"

THE END

IN OUR NEXT
ISSUE

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So we are always very careful to do it the way it says in the book, because that is the only way to keep clear of the cops. Like, other gangs around here snatch stuff, only snatching is not according to law. According to the book you gotta find it. If you find something it's yours unless you find the owner and who's crazy like that? But if you snatch it you can get framed like my old man. So we don't never snatch apples, frinstance, off a the stand, but if it's laying on the ground and maybe somebody just knocked it off by accident like it

(Continued On Page 92)

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CRACK DETECTIVE

(Continued From Page 91)

could even of been my best friend Muggsy knocked it off but I didn't see it happen, how do I know who it belongs to? It's on the ground, so it's finding, and I can keep it.

Pop told me about that. He knows a lot about law from when he worked for the mouthpiece, and things he don't know we ask Benny, my sister having married an attorney-at-law on account Pop was always talking about how smart they are, and she thought it would make the old man happy only it didn't.

Well, anyway, it is very useful having a lawyer in the family for a guy who wants to always do according to the book. Muggsy and me was in O'Donnell's pool parlor a couple days ago, and this dude from the west side comes in with some slick chick who don't look like pool parlor stuff at all. So they play maybe one-two-games, and all the time me and Muggsy, we could see they're watching us, and talking. So they're slummin! That's ok with us and we put on a good show for the customers, but the payoff comes when the dude walks out and he leaves his wallet on the table, and O'Donnell didn't see nothin.

There was about fifty pieces of good green cabbage in that hunk of leather, and we was...were...just figuring on what to do first, Muggsy and me, when O'Donnell turned around fast and saw it. He says we gotta leave it with him a couple days, the dude will maybe come back for it. Well, we always thought O'Donnell was a right guy and we ask him is that how it is in the law and he says sure; and as we are always very careful to do according to the book, we leave the lettuce with O'Donnell in case the dude shows.

Well, me and Muggsy, we been practically haunting that joint ever since, and today we says to O'Donnell that dude ain't coming back. Guess not, says O'Donnell, so we says, ok, lets have it. Muggsy has to be cute and he says O'Donnell could keep the wallet for the sentimental associations, which was not my idea at all since I wouldn't mind owning a wallet like that, but I says sure, all we want is the half-century.

(Continued On Page 94)

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CRACK DETECTIVE

(Continued From Page 92)

O'DONELL GIVE us a look like we're off the beam and says are we both crazy in the head? According to the book he says the moola is all his.

Now Jim O'Donell is a wise character but I had him pegged that time because I happen to know that the first guy who finds something is the guy who gets it according to law. Benny told me that when Muggsy found something I found first one time. So I says to O'Donell he better come see Benny and get his ideas straightened out.

He says, aaah, ya dumb wop, dry up.

Right away I got mad. Nobody, not even a guy as smart as Jim O'Donell can call me that, so right away I lost my temper and I let loose with a lovely right that would've finished him sure only Muggsy grabbed my arm and says, take it easy. That ain't according to the book, Georgie, he says, and we can't fix nothin this way. Let's go get Benny, he says.

And O'Donell right away puts in his two cents, saying we better stay away from the law unless we happen to feel like getting sued for assault, which we thought was very funny, so we walk out of the place with a big grin and come straight back to Cherry Street and tell Pop the whole story.

Assault? Pop yells so loud the whole street knows all about it right away. O'Donell is absolutely nuts, he says. The man should be locked up, he says, and he keeps it up for a while, then he finished up about Jim O'Donell's family and says we should sue him for the fifty. Absolutely. It's all in the book.

Well I figure it was about time I got the law to work for me seeing how I done everything according to the book ever since the time Pop got framed, and me and Muggsy we take it in high over to Benny's. Benny, I says, I wouldn't go to no other lawyer. I want you to take this case, I says, and get some dough out of O'Donell for yourself too, just like I wasn't even in the family.

Benny has to hear the whole story, so I tole it to him just like here, and

ACCORDING TO THE BOOK

then he laughs, and I can't make out is he with me or does my face look funny to him.

(What Benny told Georgie is on page 96. According to the book, where would you place your pennies? Could Georgie win a suit for the fifty, or could O'Donell get an assault conviction on Georgie?)

THE END

THE IRON GOD

(Continued From Page 63)

for the weapon, then try to leave town."

I walked out to the bus line, shivering. Well, the iron god—I could see him hovering over the city, he'd squeezed me, too. He'd squeezed me out of five hundred bucks. But he hadn't dropped me on Skid Row. Instead, he'd dropped me in a little vine-clad cottage where I had a wife and five kids waiting for papa to come home—with a rubber check, which was to come bouncing back marked "insufficient funds."

THE END

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Thousands of folks are now hearing normal again and are no longer bothered by buzzing, ringing, hissing head noises, dizziness, ear irritation, since they removed hard impacted wax. But follow doctor's advice. Never, never try to remove impacted wax with finger nails, tooth-picks, hairpins or any instrument. The safe way is with Orotune Ear Drops. Tests by well known laboratory prove them absolutely harmless used as directed.

Orotune has brought better hearing to so many who were deafened by impacted wax that you owe it to yourself to try it.

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FREE BOOK

WHAT BENNY TOLD GEORGIE

You should have bet on O'Donell. He had the legal right of way. Usually, it's true that the first person to find a lost item becomes the legal owner against all but the original owner. If finder No. 1 loses it, and sees it later in the possession of finder No. 2 he can get it back.

If the property of a customer or visitor is left or misplaced, in a store, hotel, bank, or any similar place, no matter who finds it, the property is legally left in the hands of the owner of the place, with the idea that he will not spend it, but will take care of it in case the owner discovers his loss at a future date and comes back to inquire about it.

Even though Georgie did not succeed in hitting O'Donell, and could therefore not be convicted of assault and battery, he was open to a charge of assault. Any action or indication of violence performed in such a manner as to arouse a "reasonable" fear in a "reasonable" person constitutes assault. Georgie raised his arm and started a punch going in O'Donell's direction. The fact that he was stopped by a third party does not change the facts that he intended to hit O'Donell, had the means with which to do it, and indicated by his actions that he was about to do it. Intention, ability, and probability of action are all the law is concerned with in assault. If Georgie had succeeded in hitting O'Donell it would have been assault and battery.

THE END

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**MURDER ON
MY KEYBOARD**
By JACK BRADLEY
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This new 128-page book, "Stammering, Its Cause and Correction," describes the Bogue Unit Method for scientific correction of stammering and stuttering—successful for 46 years. Benj. N. Bogue, Dept. 7236, Circle Tower, Indianapolis 4, Ind.



ADVICE FOR BAD SKIN

**Stop Worrying Now About Pimples, Blackheads
And Other Externally Caused Skin Troubles
JUST FOLLOW SKIN DOCTOR'S SIMPLE DIRECTIONS**

By Betty Memphis

Have you ever stopped to realize that the leading screen stars whom you admire, as well as the beautiful models who have lovely, soft white skin, were all born just like you with a lovely smooth skin?

The truth is that many girls and women do not give their skin a chance to show off the natural beauty that lies hidden underneath those externally caused pimples, blackheads and irritations. For almost anyone can have the natural, normal complexion which is in itself beauty. All you have to do is follow a few amazingly simple rules.

Many women shut themselves out of the thrills of life—dates, romance, popularity, social and business success—only because sheer neglect has robbed them of the good looks, poise and feminine self-assurance which could so easily be theirs. Yes, everybody looks at your face. The beautiful complexion, which is yours for the asking, is like a permanent card of admission to all the good things of life that every woman craves. And it really can be yours—take my word for it!—no matter how discouraged you may be this very minute about those externally caused skin miseries.

Medical science gives us the truth about a lovely skin. There are small specks of dust and dirt in the air all the time. When these get into the open pores in your skin, they can in time cause the pores to become larger and more susceptible to dirt particles, dust and infection. These open pores begin to form blackheads which become in-

fected and bring you the humiliation of pimples, blackheads or other blemishes. When you neglect your skin by not giving it the necessary care, you leave yourself wide open to externally caused skin miseries. Yet proper attention with the double Viderm treatment may mean the difference between enjoying the confidence a fine skin gives you or the embarrassment of an ugly, unbeautiful skin that makes you want to hide your face.



A screen star's face is her fortune. That's why she makes it her business to protect her complexion against pimples, blackheads and blemishes. Your face is no different. Give it the double treatment it needs and watch those skin blemishes go away.

The double Viderm treatment is a formula prescribed by a skin doctor with amazing success, and costs you only a few cents daily. This treatment consists of two jars. One contains Viderm Skin Cleanser, a jelly-like formula which penetrates and acts as an anti-septic upon your pores. After you use this special Viderm Skin Cleanser, you simply apply the Viderm Fortified Medicated Skin Cream. You rub this in, leaving an almost invisible protective covering for the surface of your skin.

This double treatment has worked wonders for so many cases of external skin troubles that it may help you, too—in fact, your money will be refunded



If it doesn't. Use it for only ten days. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose. It is a guaranteed treatment. Enjoy it. Your dream of a clear, smooth complexion may come true in ten days or less.

Use your double Viderm treatment every day until your skin is smoother and clearer. Then use it only once a week to remove stale make-up and dirt specks that infect your pores, as well as to aid in healing external irritations. Remember that when you help prevent blackheads, you also help to prevent externally caused skin miseries and pimples.

Incidentally, while your two jars and the doctor's directions are on their way to you, be sure to wash your face as often as necessary. First use warm water, then cleanse with water as cold as you can stand it, in order to freshen, stimulate and help close your pores. After you receive everything, read your directions carefully. Then go right to it and let these two fine formulas help your dreams of a beautiful skin come true.

Just mail your name and address to Betty Memphis, care of the New York Skin Laboratory, 206 Division Street, Dept. 41, New York 2, N. Y. By return mail you will receive the doctor's directions, and both jars, packed in a safety-sealed carton. On delivery, pay two dollars plus postage. If you wish, you can save the postage fee by mailing the two dollars with your letter. If you are in any way dissatisfied, your money will be cheerfully refunded. To give you an idea of how fully tested and proven the Viderm double treatment is, it may interest you to know that, up to this month, over two hundred and twelve thousand women have ordered it on my recommendation. If you could only see the thousands of happy, grateful letters that have come to me as a result, you would know the joy this simple treatment can bring. And, think of it—the treatment must work for you, or it doesn't cost you a cent.



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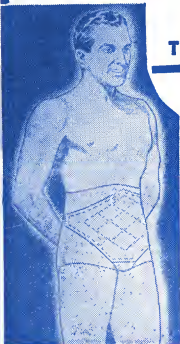
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